

# PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

ENTERTAINMENT

## 'IT'S NOT EVEN A JOB'

David Nagamine is a serial entrepreneur who started in corporate finance. Now his business is to create innovative fun for all ages.

BY BRIAN MCINNIS | 8-10

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#### Keeping live theater at the core

Deena Dray, executive director of Diamond Head Theatre, anticipates a house full of happy audiences for its upcoming productions, while closing on the last stretch of its capital campaign. **KELSEY KUKAUA, 23**

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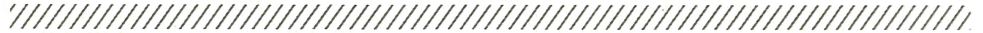
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**David Nagamine,** owner of Razor Sports located in Ka Makana Alii. The space can accommodate families or larger parties looking for some fun.

EUGENE TANNER | PBN

# CATCHING THE DRIFT

Razor Sports and Razor Games are on different wings of Ka Makana Alii but serve the same purpose: They are meant to be enjoyed by kids, or kids at heart.

BY BRIAN MCINNIS | [bmcinnis@bizjournals.com](mailto:bmcinnis@bizjournals.com)

**F**or most of his adult life, David Nagamine drifted from business model to business model in pursuit of something both simple and elusive. ¶ Fun. ¶ The co-owner of two entertainment concepts that sprang up within the last year, Nagamine, 58, thinks he's finally found it. ¶ Razor Sports (go-cart racing and drifting) and Razor Games (Nerf blaster battles) are on different wings of Ka Makana Alii but serve the same purpose: They are meant to be enjoyed by kids, or kids at heart.



At the same time, the live-activities spaces, built for a combined \$180,000, allowed the serial entrepreneur a chance to reduce his reliance on a traditional retail business like his Razor Concepts – his Pearlridge store for myriad toys and curiosities like skateboards, Pokemon cards and kendama. The internet was already taking annual bites into its revenues – and then the coronavirus pandemic happened.

He thinks he and business partner Paulo Salas met a need, both for themselves and a restless populace in need of something to do, with the new ventures.

"It's so much harder to capture these trends, because they're coming and going so fast," Nagamine told Pacific Business News. "And so, that's why the change to something ... it was going to be in racing, but it was going to be an activity for the kids – to bring the kids out with their parents to have a good time."

Both Razor spaces accept reservations for large group events, but typically take walk-ups for increments of 10 minutes (for the carts) or 30 (for the Nerf darts) and give a time estimate, then page people when it's their turn.

Tina Yamaki, president of the Retail Merchants of Hawaii, said social trends have shifted, to where people expect to be engaged during their shopping experience. It doesn't even need to be an interactive activity; it could be getting a facial or their hair done while shopping for shampoo or makeup, or stopping by a minute clinic for a shop or checkup while picking up a prescription.

All fall under the term, "retail-tainment," she said.

"If you call any of the large shopping malls, Pearlridge, Ala Moana, they have something going on, whether it's putt-putt glow golf, all kinds of stuff. It's wild," Yamaki said. "It's no longer what you were used to growing up years ago. It's really evolving now."

#### A WINDING ROAD

Nagamine has used "Razor" in the names of his stores since 2000, when he decided to capitalize on the popularity of the "Fast and the Furious" fran-



Customers race around the indoor course on electric Razor-brand Crazy Carts at Razor Sports.

EUGENE TANNER | PBN

chise by opening an automobile accessories shop at Pearlridge, also called Razor Sports. But recently, he saw the way the brick-and-mortar retail market was headed and folded that into Razor Concepts in 2019.

"Every year, the internet takes a little more, a little more," he said. "[Building the new spaces] was a way out, a way to the future, really."

Although Razor Sports buys its go-carts equipment from Razor, the national scooter company, the local company has no official affiliation. The name was meant to evoke being on the "razor's edge" of new trends, but was also inspired by a prior venture.

At his Field of Dreams store at Ala Moana Center in the 1990s, Nagamine sold Razor scooters – then all the rage – that he bought in bulk on a trip to China.

The name has endured through myriad ventures, and occasional misadventures. Somewhere along the way, he tried to refurbish and resell Toyota fork lifts. That was not



#### RAZOR SPORTS (go carts)

**Location:**  
Ka Makana  
Alii

**Pricing:**  
\$15-20  
per session

**Hours:**  
11 a.m.-7  
p.m., **M-Thu**;  
11 a.m.-9  
p.m. **Fri**;  
10 a.m.-9  
p.m. **Sat**;  
10 a.m.-6  
p.m. **Sun**

#### RAZOR GAMES (Nerf blasters)

**Pricing:**  
\$15-upward  
per session

**Hours:**  
10 a.m.-9  
p.m., **M-Sat**;  
10 a.m.-6  
p.m. **Sun**



COURTESY DAVID NAGAMINE

successful.

"It's fun to look back at the things we've done, the mistakes we've made, and how you got to where you are. I'm just thankful I survived," said Nagamine.

The 7,000-square-foot cart racing space near Macy's, featuring two Hawaiiana-themed tracks and modified electric "Crazy Carts" made for drifting around turns, didn't see much traffic when it first launched in December. But it has steadily gained traction to where it sees more than 100 customers during weekdays and 200-plus

on weekends, Nagamine said.

Its 30 vehicles, including some smaller editions for children, resemble a bumper car without the bumper, replaced by the wheels of a shopping cart. The carts have a handle that can be pulled to control the amount of drift going forward, backward or sideways, but is not necessary to use.

Nagamine opened a "Mario-kart"-themed Razor Sports raceway at Pearlridge a month before Ka Makana Alii, but that

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space was closed by Pearlridge management in May in favor of an apparel store, he said. He's hoping to open another there by the end of the year.

Razor Games, with obstacles for Nerf dart and ball firefights in a neon, futuristic-themed 3,000-square-foot space near Consolidated Theaters, typically sees more traffic in the area but is just building a following, having launched in May on a temporary lease as a sort of trial run.

"They came to us with an opportunity and an idea and [Ka Makana Alii] ownership said, 'let's give it a shot,'" said Stephanie England, the mall's general manager. "That's what we're about ... our community and supporting local businesses."

Nagamine said he's been profitable there within the first two months of establishing Razor Sports, and that he's been approached by people on the Mainland asking him to expand.

So far, he's declined. Someday, perhaps, he'll consider helping others with their build-outs – for a fee.

Meeting the demands of a growing West Oahu community is worthy enough at the moment.

"It's definitely kudos to Stephanie for taking a chance on a person like me," he said. "I was experienced in retail, but I had no idea what I was doing when starting this business. We started from nothing. There was nothing like it in the whole country."

Both Razor spaces require significant upkeep. There are the pandemic considerations, like distancing barriers and constant sanitation of equipment, and hospital-grade ventilation filtration systems that cost \$8,000.

Razor Sports carts, purchased for \$450 a pop, are constantly being maintained and having parts swapped out, Nagamine said. At Razor Games, a few thousand Nerf darts and balls must be replaced every week.

#### ALL IN THE FAMILY

Business success runs in his family. His grandfather, Steven Nagamine, was the found-



Nagamine inspects the drivetrain of a car that is under repair.

EUGENE TANNER | PSBJ

er of the Flamingo restaurants, including the original 1959 Flamingo Café along Ala Moana Boulevard where Restaurant Row is now.

His father followed his grandfather into business right away, but his mother forbade David and his two siblings from working in the family Flamingo restaurants downtown, on the Windward side and in Pearl City.

She wanted them to have a chance to be their natural selves, and so it was; his brother became a doctor, his sister an architect.

He thought he'd go into corporate finance.

Nagamine was off working on the East Coast for computer companies IBM and Digital Equipment in the mid-1980s. But it was only a few Boston winters before he decided to come back to Hawaii with his wife in 1990.

In the process of return-



**"I don't know how I got to here in my life, but however I got to here, I can truly say my job is like play. It's not even a job."**

**DAVID NAGAMINE,**  
owner of  
Razor Sports

ing home followed by a stint with the University of Hawaii's Shidler College of Business, a family entrepreneurial streak was rekindled.

"[Finance] is just crunching numbers. I can do it left and right; I'm good at it," he said. "But I don't enjoy it. This is actually fun for me. I don't know how I got to here in my life, but however I got to here, I can truly say my job is like play. It's not even a job."

There were some lessons learned the hard way. Tougher than the pandemic, he said, was the Great Recession of the late 2000s.

"It's been a ride. In 2008, I was selling everything I had ... to stay afloat. Somehow I made it through."

At present, he employs 45 across his businesses.

The long-term plan is to align Razor Sports and Razor Games in the same wing of the mall, when space becomes

available, and upgrade Razor Games to 5,000 square feet or more. Eventually, he'd like to have both under the same roof, and said "stay tuned" on future projects to pair with the carts and darts.

Despite the increasing difficulty of the traditional retail model, he intends to keep Razor Concepts open for business. He still gets a kick out of seeing kids' fascinated faces pressed up against the front window.

"The stores, and the people in them, are just like my kids," he said. "My two main managers have been with me 15 years. I've seen them grow up."

He does not have children of his own, but occasionally borrows his nephews to try out equipment.

Nagamine, who wears a patch over his right eye, chuckled as he confirmed to PBN that it was not a result of a Nerf blaster accident. ▮