



Pa'auilo Mauka Kalopa Community Association
Photo courtesy of Karl Backus

Monthly News & Updates

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February 2021 Newsletter

Local Talent: Stan Gollaher

From Would-be Preacher to Preaching Wood

By Denning Powell & Ruth Bennett



Stan Gollaher with one of his famous Koa rockers.

Something about the Hamakua Coast attracts creativity. That's the working hypothesis, anyway. Here's a case in point: Stan Gollaher, woodworker extraordinaire and owner of Raiatea Woodworks in Pa'auilo.

Before he was old enough to shave, and certainly before he

was old enough to need one of his own hand-made rockers, Stan began making small boats. Then, when he was 19, he started building a 48-ft trimaran, all hand-crafted. His plan was to use it to sail between small Pacific islands, delivering food and other essentials to under-served communities, seasoned with some good Christian preaching.



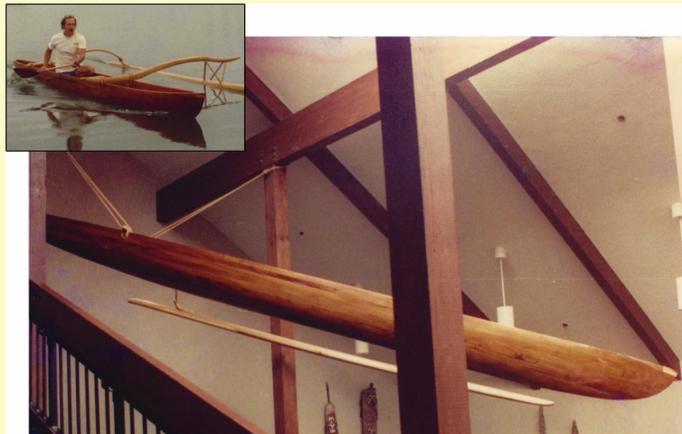
Stan with a "starburst" table top.

Three years later he finished the trimaran, christened *Messiah*, but by that time had decided against a preaching career. Stan and his new bride Kathy and another couple sailed that boat from San Diego to French Polynesia. Old school – no engine, just sails, and navigation by the sun and stars with a sextant. No risk aversion there, and certainly great confidence in the product of his craftsmanship. After 23 days, they made landfall on the Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific.

A few months later, a storm kicked the trimaran onto a reef on the island of Raiatea, and not much of it could be salvaged. Stan and Kathy remained on Raiatea and started a boat-building business. It was so successful they saturated the local market with his boats. At that point Stan got counseled by one of his good local friends to diversify. That was the beginning of a wonderful lifelong woodworking venture. He made some chairs. Some tables. Some bars. Word spread. Hotels and restaurants began clamoring for his products.

After eight years and several thousand pieces of work in Raiatea, Stan and Kathy decided to return to California. They started an expanded woodworking business in San Diego. It took off, and at one point Stan had five employees. His custom pieces produced there included not only furniture, but cabinetry, wood sculptures, spiral staircases, and many unique custom requests.

The Catamaran Hotel in San Diego, for example, has a 20-ft long Koa canoe hung from the lobby ceiling. It's the real thing, not just a decoration.



Stan's ceiling ornament in the lobby of the Catamaran Hotel.

And since it's the real thing, Stan delivered the canoe by paddling it up to the hotel beach. It gets taken out on the water and paddled once a year, as a hotel tradition. Hundreds of his pieces may be found in hotels, restaurants, offices, and private homes all over the country.

But San Diego eventually got too busy for Kathy and Stan, so thirty years ago they came to the Big Island for a more leisurely lifestyle. Here, Raiatea Woodworks is just Stan, with Kathy as administrative support. He typically has about four projects going at the same time, in different stages. "That's a comfortable variety of tasks", he says, "and it's good to mix things up". So, he does; and there's no shortage of special requests. As an artisan, he's always receptive to a customer's concept for an unusual display case or a decorative table. That's how a creation sometimes starts -- "If they can dream it up, I can sketch it out

and make it!", Stan says.



Stan explaining his uniquely refitted saw mill.

All this creativity happens in a mauka Pa'auilo shop with a large mill that saws logs into boards two and a quarter inches thick. These boards become the raw materials for most of his products. The workshop also has a drying kiln and a variety of saws, lathes, and other woodworking tools. Stan uses only fallen or dead trees as raw material, so he has become one of nature's recyclers.

His eye sees form and structure in the raw lumber and knows how to bring them out and use them. The rockers on the bottom of his rocking chairs, for example, are made from lumber pieces where the grain naturally follows a curve. That means the grain doesn't "run out" and create a weakness that could later crack off.



A sunburst pattern in a Gollaher rocker seatback

It takes him about eight days to make a Koa rocker, from lumber selection to the finished product. His rockers are very comfortable, fitting to and supporting a body's spinal curve. Some chairs are even custom-sized and formed to fit a specific client. And each chair is so perfectly balanced that it rocks for a long while when you get out of it.

Another typical feature in the hundreds of chairs Stan has built: his signature natural "sunburst" in the seatback. This sunburst pattern is created in the grain of the wood when a limb branches out from the trunk and must strain itself to fight against gravity. His creative eye picks out that pattern when logs exit his sawmill as planks of raw material. The rough wood itself often speaks to Stan, telling him by its shape or grain or

pattern what final expression should be brought out of the wood. Every piece he creates is the result of a loving partnership between natural wood and master craftsman.



Almost all the furniture in the Gollaher household is hand-made, naturally. The tables, the chairs, the staircase to the second floor. Their house is a showcase for woodworking talent.

I asked Stan where his talent -- his creativity and feel for the wood -- came from; was it nature or nurture? That's an old question: a genetic gift or something absorbed from a friendly environment? That stumped him for a bit, and then he said "Both, probably." His mom was a hands-on carpenter, his dad a hands-on aeronautical engineer who built airplanes. Grandparent lineage includes a master gunsmith and several other artisans. So, the genes are there, but exposure to all sorts of craftsmanship from a very young age probably was a big factor too, he says.

Wasted space in a corner? Not in this house. A neat lighted corner cabinet for displaying a variety of seashells.

Stan is a classical example of learning by doing. He's largely self-taught. And he's old-school: no computer design apps, thank you; hand sketches are fine. Sometimes even sketches are not needed; the patterns flow from his mind through his hands right into the wood.

The website www.raiateawoodworks.com has many examples of Stan's work, and includes a fascinating log of his life's journey and evolution as a woodworker, written by his wife and work-partner Kathy. It's a lot of fun to read.

Stan Gollaher didn't become a preacher, but now he preaches wood. It's his passion, the palette for his creativity. And when you look at the extraordinary body of work this man has produced over his lifetime, it may be more appropriate to say that the wood preaches Stan's story.

(Photos by Denning Powell & Ruth Bennett)



WELCOME!! NEW BOARD MEMBER AND COMMITTEE CHAIR!!

We are absolutely delighted to welcome to the PMKCA Board two new members.

Secretary, Kathy Gollaher:

Kathy Gollaher, mentioned frequently in the above article, has volunteered to take over the Secretary position from Diana Nui who resigned from the position at the end of 2020.

Kathy has been a teacher for many years and recently retired from Kanu o ka 'Aina charter school in Kamuela. She has lived in Pa'auilo for some 30 years but has not had the time until now to give back to the community.

As Kathy said in an email recently, "It will be good to be active in the community again!" We can't be happier that she has joined the PMKCA Board!

Diana Nui is now more free to continue her work on the Kalopa Park and Invasive Species Committees. We will miss her at Board meetings, but know that she is still an active contributor to PMKCA's goals. Thank you, Diana!!

Water, Health & Utilities Committee chair, Liam Gray:

At our January Board meeting, a new member of our community, Liam Gray, attended to see what our association was all about and, with an abundance of enthusiasm for our community, volunteered to assume the chair of the Water, Health and Utilities Committee.

Liam recently moved from Kaneohe on Oahu, practices organic farming in Pa'auilo Mauka and is interested in creating a native Hawaiian plant nursery.

Liam is taking over from Jami Sales, who had kept track of our community's water and utilities concerns for many years. Thank you, once again, Jami, for everything you have done for PMKCA and our community.

And thank you, Liam, for your willingness to work for our community's welfare!

Next PMKCA Meeting

Thursday, April 8, 2021, 7PM PMKCA Board of Directors Meeting
(Probably by Zoom Videoconference. Contact a Board member for details.)

We continue to work at the Board and committee level on behalf of our communities. If you have any interests or concerns, we encourage you to email any Board member and to attend the Jan 14 Board meeting.

PLEASE!

RENEW YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP IN PMKCA!
(It's easy to do - and easy to forget!)

In these trying times, PMKCA continues to support our communities by funding projects and making contributions to other local groups that serve our communities. Your dues (\$20 per calendar year) are our primary source of these necessary funds.

You can find payment options, including an easy PayPal link, on our website, www.PMKCA.org. Under "Home", click on "Membership/Dues".

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Photo courtesy of Karl Backus