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TIDES OF COMMERCE: Tony Roma returns – in Lahaina

By HARRY EAGAR, Staff Writer

Tony Roma is back in town.

WDI International Inc., which closed a Tony Roma's in Kihei a couple of years ago, has opened on the second floor of the former Kishi Building on Front Street.

WDI Vice President Darren Talai says the Kihei restaurant at Kukui Mall did well "the first six or seven years." Faced with negotiating a new lease and substantial renovations, WDI decided it preferred to be in Lahaina.

The record of high-profile restaurant chains on Front Street is mixed: Planet Hollywood and Red Lobster left, Bubba Gump's and Hard Rock Cafe are still there.

WDI has been in Hawaii with Tony Roma's for 28 years. "I believe we were the first casual dining" chain to locate in Waikiki, says Talai.

Being on the second level is not unusual for Front Street – BJ's Chicago Pizza has succeeded on the second level next door.

Talai says WDI did not face unusual problems finding workers for its 130-seat eatery. "We have very few people making minimum wage."

He says people who have not seen the Kishi Building for a while will be surprised. "It turned out beautiful."

The general manager of the Lahaina restaurant is Jun Hirano, who has worked for WDI in Japan and Saipan.

PELE WINNERS. Three Maui firms were double Pele winners this year in the Hawaii Advertising Federation's contest: Janlisa Potratz's Agape Design, Saedene Yee-Ota's Sae design and Larry Gilbert's Gilbert & Associates. All have won before. A newcomer, Carlo Carbajal at

Carbajal Designs, also got a top award. Maui firms won seven of 55 top awards in print and broadcast advertising and for excellence in design. Maui winners and clients were: Design category: menu: Agape Design, Hoku's Restaurant, "The Kahala"; package: Sae design, "Hilo Hattie Bath & Body," Hilo Hattie; Special Event Material category: invitations: Sae, "World of Paper," Spicers Paper Inc.; Outdoor Advertising category: Gilbert & Associates, "We Knew That," OMaui.com; Nontraditional Advertising category: Gilbert & Associates, "We Knew That," OMaui.com; Illustration category (two Peles): Carbajal Designs, "2006 Naish Wave Boards," Naish International; Agape, "Hoku's Paper," Hoku's Restaurant, "The Kahala."

SPA SPANGLES. Spas are such important components of the hotel business that Mobil Travel Guide now rates them separately. In the fourth rankings, just out for North America, six Hawaii spas earned four Mobil stars, and two earned three stars. The Maui County spas making the ratings were the Spa at Manele Bay, Four Seasons Resort Lanai; Spa Grande at The Grand Wailea Resort Hotel & Spa; and the Spa at Four Seasons Resort Maui, four stars each; and Spa Moana, Hyatt Regency Maui; and Spa Kea Lani at The Fairmont Kea Lani, three each.

TAX COURSE. The state Department of Taxation has posted a short video at www.hawaii.gov/tax to help landlords complete the revised general excise tax forms. The show tells how to complete Form G-45, General Excise/Use Tax Return; and it includes information on filling out the new parts of Form G-45 related to the new Oahu County Surcharge and on reporting taxes by taxation district. Once on the Web site, look on the right under County Surcharge Information.

HOTEL GUIDE. Nane and Candy Aluli have purchased the Maui Accommodations Guide, a print and Web directory of Maui's visitor accommodations, which was founded 10 years ago by Ed and Judy Mee. The guide has recently expanded its print scope (quarterly) to Molokai and will soon take in Lanai as well. Nane Aluli manages The Mauian Hotel and served two terms recently as chairman of the Maui Hotel & Lodging Association. Candy Aluli has owned a visitor industry-oriented PR agency since 1991 and is the author of the 2005 edition of the Paradise Family Guides: Maui guidebook, published by Ulysses Press.

WOW FACTOR. Art and Automation, founded in Maui in 2002 to bring theater, lighting and "smart home" techniques of the film industry to residences, earned a place in the May issue of Electronic House magazine for its design work, which won a Silver Award for "Best Wow

Factor" from the editors.

MORE ACE SPACE. Kihei ACE Hardware Store will expand into the Azeka Ribs space at Azeka Place. Store Manager Del Gossert says, "We've identified a strong need for lumber, lawn and garden, furniture and artist supplies in this area." The grand opening will be Saturday, with fishing lure demonstrations by Fiberglass Hawaii, orchid planting by Pacific Agricultural, car care with Meguiars, portrait painting with local artists and arrow cutting with JHara.

■ "Tides of Commerce" appears on the Money Matters page every other Monday. If you have an item for the column, please call reporter Harry Eagar of The Maui News at 242-6392 or fax the item to his attention at 242-9087. His e-mail address is heagar@mauinews.com.