

Complimentary

# MAKAI

Ocean Lifestyle Magazine

October/November 2008

## MIKE FOX

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# Mike Fox

By Shannon Chang

Although this last trip was an opportunity to spend time with family, most of the traveling Fox does is for work. As co-founder of C4waterman based here in Hawaii, and the new owner of Boardworks International based in southern California, Fox is often flying in an endless triangle: Idaho, California, Hawaii, Idaho, repeat. When you meet people like Fox, you know that they are ones who have found their calling. There is no tone of stress or pressure in his voice when describing his responsibilities, just a laid back enthusiasm about the companies, and the clear mission they have to benefit the ocean community.

Fox's love of the ocean started as a young boy here in Hawaii. Growing up in Ewa Beach his mom would take the kids out all summer to White Plains. His parents who were both surfers got Fox up and riding at age nine.

Fox remembers, "The first time I surfed anywhere else but there [White Plains] was Makaha. We rarely went into Waikiki so that was the next spot I surfed. I can remember the first time going out there I probably was about 12 or so, a young kid, and I remember Buff coming down a wave and just taking his board as I was paddling out and turning it over in front of me and I was just like 'Wow.' It's wild because he is one of the first great surfers I ever remembered." Little did Fox know that he would one day compete in Buffalo Keaulana's surfing classic, and develop some life long friendships with Keaulana's family and friends.

Fox's love for the ocean is apparent in the way he describes why he first got into contests. "We'd go to Sandy Beach and Makapu'u when the regular surf on the north shore wasn't very good and just surf the wind swell and just have a blast out there riding the tube on your belly. How great is that? Body boarding came along and I was doing some of the body surfing contests and so I would grab a body board and go enter the body board division. At that time you had body boarding and hand boarding and boogie boarding and we had the rubber mat. Boogie board was sort of the generation above the rubber mats ... So if you're at the beach and they're having contests, why not enter anything you can cause you get to go out and surf when no one else is in the water."

Throughout high school Fox chased swell after swell, as well as working as a City and County lifeguard, sailing and paddleboard racing with Outrigger Canoe Club. Later he would also compete in six man outrigger paddling. To sum up those years, "If it floated and we could put it in the water it was something we would ride."

After spending a few years on the mainland for school Fox returned home and was in the job market for several years when he chose to take the path many desire, yet few achieve, and started his own business. "I started my own business at 27 years old, and never had a clue that it would be the success story that it was. I just thought I wanted to pay the mortgage, have a little money in the bank and raise a family. From all the sports and competitions I am very driven and competitive and I just went for broke. I worked hard and tried to build the best business I could." The company, Hawaii Modular Space was not only a fiscal success, but a philanthropic one as well.

Fox sold Hawaii Modular Space in 2007, and went into business with friends Brian Keaulana and Todd Bradley. Together they founded C4waterman. Keaulana and Bradley had been doing a lot of stand up paddling over the last few years. They came to Fox with the idea for C4 as a stand up paddle business, and Fox almost said no. "At first I was like 'I don't know. Do you think this is going to be a popular sport?' Of course now everyone is doing it."

When asked what he attributed to the skyrocketing popularity of the sport, he gave credit to its universal appeal. "...it's multifaceted. You can paddle in the channel inside at Ala Moana Park and someone from 3 years old to 80 years old can do it. You can then paddle into open water or small surf and have your own sort of open ocean cruise or a little surf session at your favorite local break, or at a local break that nobody surfs because it is not really a great small board wave, but it's a great stand up wave.

"And then you can take it to the level that Brian and Dave [Parmenter] and a lot of other great surfers, and watermen around the world are doing and their surfing big high performance waves. ...you can take it from the ocean and go inland. We've been doing that. ... We go on the lakes. You can ride the wake behind the ski boat, or we're doing the river thing. You go down the river and ride the rapids. Any age, any gender, any form of water can use a stand up board."

With the rapid growth of the sport, C4 holds respect for the ocean community as a vital company tenet. Fox took care to state that with stand up, you may have a big board that you can easily paddle around other people, but you should remember you are sharing the water with others. "Just because you can catch every wave, doesn't mean you should."

Another way to care for the ocean is to care for the next generation of waterman. C4waterman has already begun a tradition of giving back. Keaulana came up with the idea for the name of their foundation, Ku Ikaika, which means stand strong. This year C4 was an associate sponsor of the first Ku Ikaika Challenge out at Makaha. This big wave contest hosted some of the best stand up paddlers from around the world. The prize money went to the Junior Lifeguard program.

With commitments around the world, you might think it is difficult for Fox to find time to still get out in the ocean. Amazingly the passion that he had for getting out there as a kid is still a strong pull today. When he is not near the ocean he tries to get out at least once a day for a swim, to stay in condition for the next time he will have a chance to paddle or surf. When he goes to California for Boardworks he surfs there every morning. When he is in Hawaii he surfs everyday even if no one else is on the water. "I always try to find a way to find my way to the ocean."

Walter Cronkite once said, "I can't imagine a person becoming a success who doesn't give this game of life everything he's got." Whether it's business, or being out on the water Mike Fox has charged opportunity after opportunity. It has definitely worked for him.