

How Mokihana Aquatics Started Hawaii's only Ocean Safety Component to Learn To Swim

The year was 1999. The world was supposed to end. But, for Mokihana Aquatics, it was the beginning of taking something great 'To Infinity and Beyond' (thanks, Buzz Lightyear... raising four kids I know all the Disney classics).

Yuichi Shimabukuro. They called him Shima. I called him Mr. Shimabukuro out of respect. Their family was my wife's family's neighbor for their whole lives. We bought and built a house behind our (my wife's) family's house. Our family was invited to Mr. Shimabukuro's granddaughter's first baby luau.

At this great baby luau party at the Wailua Houselots park, after a few hours and a few adult beverages, Mr. Shimabukuro came and sat at our table next to my wife and me. What an honor. Then he proceeded to chastise me. I remember it almost verbatim. "You one great swim teacha— one great coach. You teach everybody on Kauai how for swim. Keiki to kupuna. Everybody know you. But, I no can take my grandkids on my boat because they no know nothing about the ocean. You wen' teach them. How come? Us live on one island."

I said nothing. Mr. Shimabukuro told me to do something about that. My wife looked at me and said, "no worry, that's how Uncle when he drinking." I told her, 'no, he was right.'

That night in 1999 I went home and started looking up all my swim journals from the last 20 years of teaching. I prefer my own experiences, but having been mentored by some of the best in Hawaii and the world I put together a program in Mr. Yuichi Shimabukuro's honor.

It took off. After years of reviewing and revising our ocean component I was ready to show my neighbor what we had done at his request. Unfortunately Mr. Shimabukuro died before I was able to show him what an outstanding program we had developed because of him.

Mokihana Aquatics' Learn To Swim swimmers can now go fishing with their parents and grandparents because they've learned about waves, ocean currents, and how to be safe while in, on, or about the water. Not just calm water, but the ocean, also. We take our students on a reef walk. You would be surprised at how many kids have never walked on a reef, or picked shells, in the life that they live here. We roll them around in the surf and teach them the lifesaving skill of the 'duck dive.' We teach them to have fun in the ocean. Like Uncle said, "Us live on one island."

Mahalo, Mr. Yuichi (Shima) Shimabukuro for giving Kauai a great gift. Only on Kauai and only with Mokihana Aquatics can you learn these skills. As a plus to Mr. Shimabukuro, hundreds of parents have come up to me after our ocean safety component to our Learn To Swim class to say, 'thanks.'