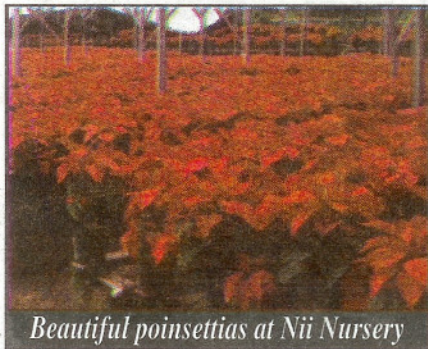


# The uncertain future of Kamilonui Valley

When you round the bend where Hawaii Kai Drive ends and blink twice, you leave the sprawling suburbs behind. It is suddenly quiet, rural. This is what you imagine vast, remote Hawaii Kai felt like back in the day before Henry Kaiser implemented his vision for residential development. Before dairy farms and piggeries were



*Beautiful poinsettias at Nii Nursery*

systematically replaced with roads, housing, schools, and businesses. This particular 87-acre section, Kamilonui Valley, was to remain agricultural. It was part of the plan. Kamilonui Valley, the last vestige of rural East Honolulu, was part of the promise.

Richard and Judy Nii have worked their six-acre lot in Kamilonui Valley since 1969. "Turn left at the coconut tree and check out our poinsettias," Richard Nii grins, "we've got thousands of them going!" R. & S. Nii Nursery employs four family members and six others full time, and they grow every kind of greenery to beautify your home or landscape in any corner of our island. It's hard, rewarding work. Richard tells with great pleasure the story of introducing a city girl to the delight of her first lilikoi right off the vine. Judy would not trade the agricultural lifestyle for any office job and "can't think of a better way to raise kids."

The Niis are still young and their children have some interest in taking over the nursery. That is not the case for all thirteen leaseholders that make up the Kamilonui Farm Cooperative, families who have provided fruits, vegetables, and plants to the local market for generations. Several want to sell out and retire. These elderly farmers — understandably — want the best value for a lifetime of work.

Enter uber-developer Stanford Carr, who  
*see Uncertain, page 12*



*Working at the Nii Nursery*

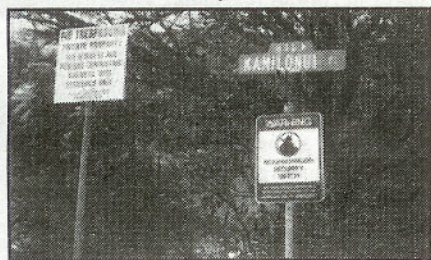
THROUGHOUT ALL OF HONOLULU BY DIRECT MAIL AND NEWSSTANDS



# Uncertain

from page 1

presented a proposal to landowner Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate (KSBE) to pave over Kamilonui Valley farms and build 200 new houses, with (verbal only) promises of a tempting cash settlement and new home in the subdivision for each family.



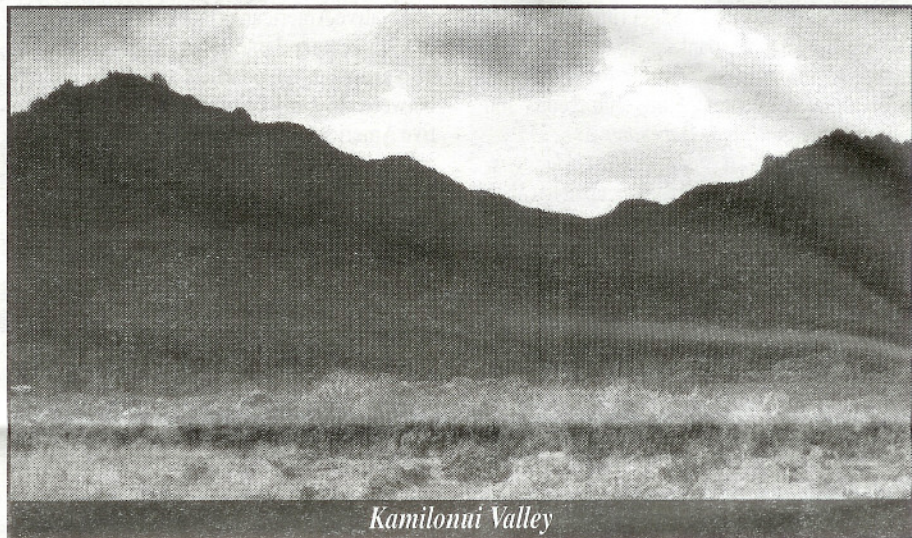
According to their lease agreements with KSBE, 100 percent of co-op members must agree to sell their lease interest. Although the media made much of the split among the thirteen families considering this deal, Judy Nii explains the fami-

lies are close and each respects the integrity and perspective of the others. They can agree to disagree, but ultimately they act as one. KSBE claims to take no position, encouraging the farmers to make their own decision.

The farmers are not in this alone. Enter Livable Hawaii Kai Hui, a group of concerned citizens promoting "sensible growth, respect for the

in Kamilonui Valley and reports that at least for now the wolf has retreated from the door.

"Elizabeth Reilly and the Hui has exactly the right idea," says Tom Yamabe, one of the old-time Valley leaseholders and former executive secretary for the Farm Bureau. He has seen the transformation of East Honolulu from the very beginning and believes the balance envisioned



Kamilonui Valley

land" who recognize the farmers' future ultimately effects every resident in Hawaii Kai. The destruction of Kamilonui Valley as an agricultural oasis would mean increased traffic congestion, sewage issues, parking hassles, and the irreplaceable loss of a unique open space and watershed that contributes substantially to the quality of life in the area.

Hui president Elizabeth Reilly expertly built an effective defense and rallied the community behind the farmers to stop further development. Councilmember Charles Djou pushed a resolution through City Council supporting agriculture

by the original planners should be honored. "I am not against development," he says, "but the community must stand up against over development, and not just in Hawaii Kai, but throughout Oahu, and throughout the state." He explains that Hawaii's peculiar system of powerful large landholders controlling the fate of thousands can be influenced only through strong public opposition. "Kamilonui Valley should be held in agriculture in perpetuity," he says. "A well-planned community brings benefits to everyone."

The larger issue remains, says Reilly. "Any developer now would have to change the Urban Growth Boundary [as set up until 2020 in the East Honolulu Sustainable Communities Plan], and change zoning. Jumping through those hoops would be a long haul." The Nii's see the advances of Stanford Carr as minor compared to the uncertainties they face when their lease with Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate comes up for re-negotiation in 2010.

"The big challenge for the community is probably in 2020," says Judy Nii, "but the struggle to preserve the family farm is NOW." She says that they cannot make any decisions about their future with the uncertainty of the lease re-negotiation hovering over them. Her fear is that the lease rent will go up so high they will be forced to move out anyway and get nothing. Farmers must have inexpensive land to survive. Does the landowner care?

"We want to believe that the landowner recognizes that a sustainable community requires balance and diversity, that there is value far beyond money in the natural beauty and livability of Hawaii Kai," says Elizabeth Reilly.

She encourages involvement and diligence on the part of all Hawaii Kai residents to keep the pressure on. When you see the many bountiful Christmas floral displays this season, she says, remember that the poinsettias came not from Mexico or from the Philippines but from your neighbors in Kamilonui Valley, whose lives buffer, preserve, protect, and bring enjoyment to your own.

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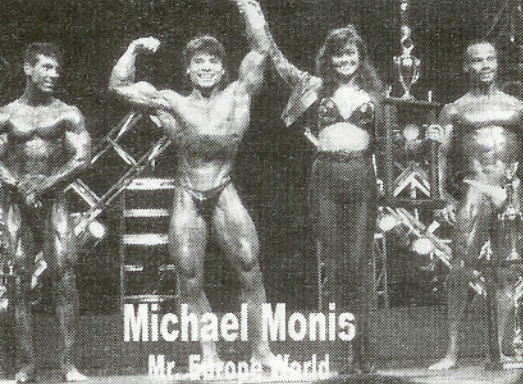
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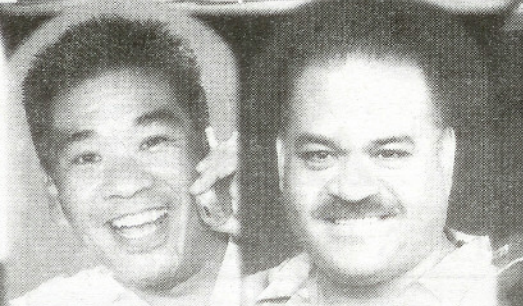
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