

Bill Mahlum gets ready to cool downtown Honolulu

BY DUANE SHIMOGAWA
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Little did Bill Mahlum know that a Hawaii panel discussion on renewable energy eight years ago would lead to construction of the state's first seawater air-conditioning project.

Talk is cheap, as they say, and the Minnesota native didn't mind coming to the warm confines of the Aloha State to discuss energy issues.

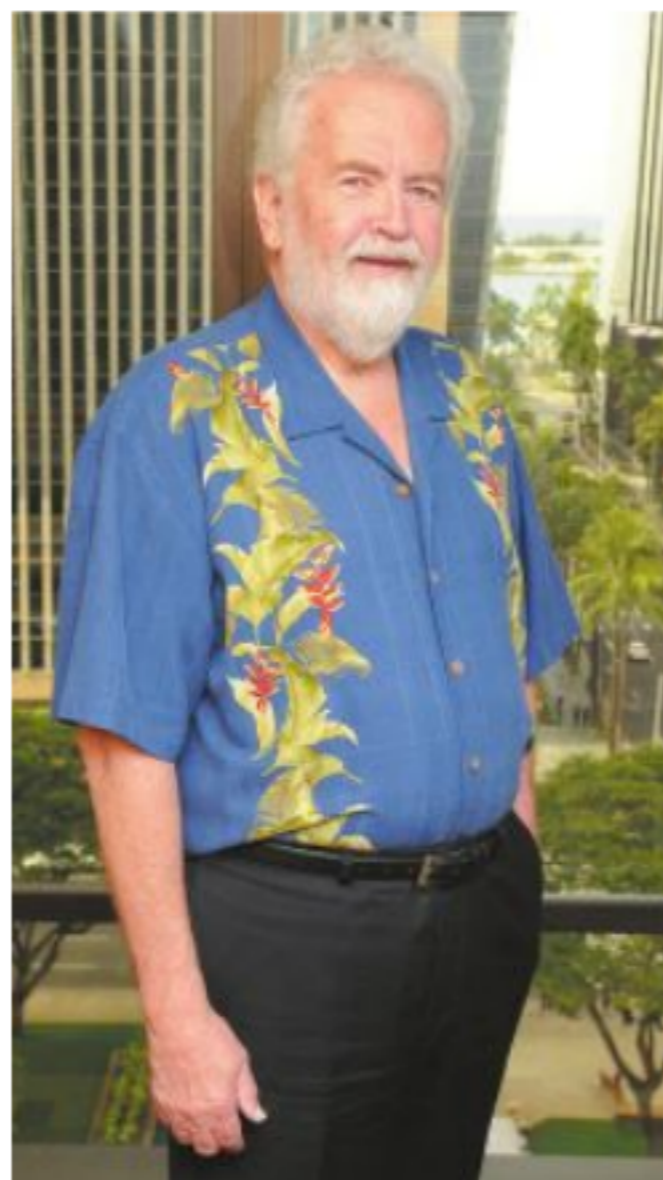
But fast forward to 2012, and the 72-year-old former energy lawyer, who splits his time between Minnesota and Hawaii, is now at the forefront of Honolulu Seawater Air Conditioning LLC, a \$250 million effort to cool downtown buildings with seawater. Work is scheduled to start in May and take about 20 months to complete, creating about a thousand construction jobs in the process.

Because of the magnitude of the effort and its potential impact, Mahlum has been selected as one of PBN's 10 to Watch for 2012.

"I've learned a lot of lessons over the years," Mahlum told PBN recently. "One of the main ones that I've learned that is especially relevant to this project is not coming in and telling people how it's done. But, instead, getting input from all parties involved and then coming up with a plan."

Mahlum said some of the groups he has worked with to get input include Hawaiian Electric Co., labor unions, the Sierra Club and the state Legislature.

In addition to his approach, the Uni-



TINA YUEN PBN

Bill Mahlum says he has "all the confidence in the world" that Honolulu Seawater Air Conditioning will succeed in cooling large office buildings.

versity of Minnesota graduate said his experience in doing similar projects has come in handy when trying to convince businesses that his ideas will work.

Mahlum has helped develop large water-

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Why watch him: He's leading an effort to build a first-of-its-kind seawater air-conditioning project in downtown Honolulu that involves major construction on at least a dozen streets. If successful, Mahlum's effort will create construction jobs and reduce electricity costs for Honolulu businesses.

cooled projects in places as diverse as Sweden and St. Paul, Minn., which in addition to cooling have heating capacities as well.

"I have all the confidence in the world that we will be successful in Honolulu as well," he said.

Walter Chong, project coordinator for the Honolulu-based engineering and surveying firm R.M. Towill, which is working with Honolulu Seawater Air Conditioning on its design phase, said despite the challenges, Mahlum seems to be the right man for the job.

"He [Mahlum] has done this before in other areas so, when the project is questioned, he is able to point at the ones that he has already helped build," Chong told PBN. "His experience brings some credibility to the project, and I think because it is new to Hawaii — everyone

hates to be the first — so that's why his experience is so important."

State Energy Office Administrator Mark Glick has been watching Mahlum's project closely.

According to the state, the downtown seawater air-conditioning effort is one of the 40 renewable-energy projects that could provide significant growth toward the state's green-energy goals.

"Certainly, he and his firm have been making slow and steady progress toward a very state-of-the-art project, and he has put his sights on the target and refuses to waver," Glick told PBN. "As far as I'm concerned, it's very exciting to have people like Bill take on these kinds of crucial, yet complex projects."

The Honolulu Seawater Air Conditioning project will draw cold, deep seawater from 4.5 miles off Oahu's southern coast into a cooling station behind the Gold Bond Building on Ala Moana Boulevard. The seawater then will pass through heat exchangers and be dispensed through a network of distribution pipes to downtown buildings. Construction work will include the installation of 15,000 feet of pipeline from the cooling station to the downtown Honolulu streets.

Work is expected to involve at least 12 streets and their intersections.

"Everyone has to keep in mind that the benefits in the end will outweigh the minor inconveniences," Mahlum said.