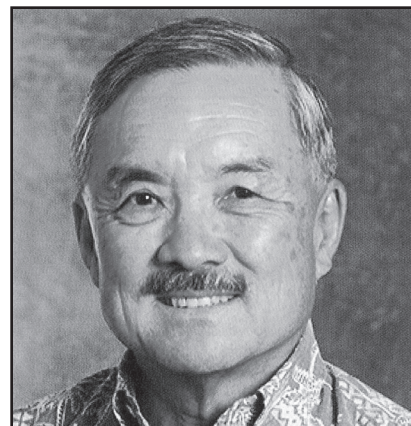


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*Honoring*  
*Russell Okata*  
*Distinguished Alumnus*



Russell K. Okata learned life values such as trust, honesty and hard work while growing up in the plantation town of Pepekeo—values that would later help him to lead the largest union in Hawaii. As a young man, Russell worked as a tray boy for the California Packing Corporation, a trainee for Pepekeo Sugar Company, a delivery boy-laborer for Tropical Fruit Distributors of Hawaii, and a cashier-clerk for Walrich Drugs. He was outstanding as a Boy Scout and attained the rank of Eagle Scout in 1959.

Russell graduated from Hilo High School in 1962, then attended UH Manoa, where he received a Bachelor's degree in business administration. He joined the HGEA in 1970 and began his steady rise through the ranks as an administrative officer and deputy executive director before becoming executive director in 1981. After serving as HGEA's executive director for 26 years, Russell retired in 2007 with the distinction of having served as the longest elected international vice president on the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO. Under Okata's stewardship, the union consistently strove to improve the lives and working conditions of its membership.

Russell also imparted his belief in giving back to the community, encouraging HGEA's 42,000-plus members in their role as parents, volunteers and community leaders to make Hawaii a better place by supporting schools, charities and youth activities. Russell himself currently serves as a trustee of the Blood Bank of Hawaii, the State of Hawaii Long-Term Care Commission, and as the Hawaii national committeeman on the Democratic National Committee. His previous service to the community includes the Aloha United Way, Bishop Museum, Hawaii Community Foundation, the Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific, Hawaii Visitors Bureau, Hawaii Medical Services Association, Public Schools of Hawaii Foundation, and University of Hawaii Alumni Association, amongst others.

In 2001, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO, honored Russell with the Art Takei Award for Outstanding Leadership. He received the NAACP Award for Outstanding Community Service in 1996, was named Hawaii's Distinguished Citizen by the Aloha Counsel Boy Scouts of America in 1992, and was selected as Hawaii Communicator of the Year by the International Association of Business Communicators/Hawaii Chapter in 1986. In 2008, Russell received the Bishop Museum Ulupono Chairman's Award, in 2007 the Normal Ahakuelo United Way Labor Award, and the Distinguished Alumni Award, UH Hilo. In 2010, Russell received the Ho'oula Award from the Hawaii Institute for Public Affairs.

Okata and his wife, Gail, have two children: daughter Camille Masutomi and son Ryan.

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