
Honoring
The Late State Representative
CLIFTON TSUJI
Distinguished Alumnus



Community leader **Clifton “Clift” Tsuji** was a humble man who never forgot his rural upbringing in Hilo. Born and raised in the plantation town of Papaikou, Tsuji graduated from Hilo High School in 1959. After earning a communications degree from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, he went on to study banking and economics at the University of Washington’s Pacific Coast Banking School.

Tsuji served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1959-1965, and his business experience included a stint as program director at KIPA Radio and, most notably, a 30-plus year tenure as senior vice president of Central Pacific Bank in Hilo. Tsuji also served as vice president of Hilo Candy Co. from 2003-04.

In 2004, Tsuji was elected to the State House of Representatives representing House District 3, which included Keaukaha, parts of Hilo, Panaewa and Waiakea. He played a key role as chair of the House Agriculture Committee, where he worked tirelessly in the best interest of his constituents. As chair, Tsuji was an informed and steadfast proponent of biotechnology as a means of achieving a more abundant and reliable food supply by increasing crop yields, enhancing resistance to pests and diseases, and enabling farmers to grow crops in a more environmentally sustainable way. He also supported geothermal energy as an alternative to imported oil.

Among his many awards, Tsuji received the UH Hilo Distinguished Service Award in 2009, the Hawaii Farm Bureau’s Legislator of the Year Award in 2015, and the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) award for his leadership and support of the agricultural bioscience industry.

Throughout his life, Tsuji remained deeply involved with the community, serving on the boards of such organizations as the East Hawaii Hiroshima Kenjin Kai, Japanese Community Association of Hawaii, Hilo Medical Center Foundation, Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Hawaii, Hawaii Island Chamber of Commerce, Pacific Tsunami Museum, and the Kumamoto Kenjinkai, to name a few.

Tsuji’s sudden and unexpected passing on Nov. 15, 2016, was mourned by his two sons, Ryan and Ashley, as well as his many friends, constituents and supporters.
