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National Champion

Johnson Choi wins one of the SBAs top awards by supporting ethnic businesses

As told to Kyle Galdeira

As president of the Hong Kong-China-Hawaii Chamber of Commerce, (HKCHCC) Choi serves as a vital link between Hong Kong and Hawaii promoting economic opportunity and a healthy business climate. In April, Choi received the Small Business Association's National Small Business Champion of the Year award for his work with minority businesses. Choi shared his thoughts about Hawaii's ethnic small businesses:



Johnson Choi is helping bridge the gap created by cultural and linguistic differences.

On helping new immigrants in businesses:

The HKCHCC helps business owners understand the cultural differences on how things are done in Hawaii and the United States versus their home countries. They need to understand various rules, regulations and requirements to run their businesses in Hawaii and the United States. Business owners here must take advantage of the rule of law to protect their business interests, such as registering their copyright materials, trade names and trademarks.

On challenges faced by new immigrant businesses:

Some challenges include a lack of English-language skills as well as an inability to understand the penalty for not complying with rules and regulations. Also, there is a risk of being taken advantage of by other businesses, who know well that most ethnic business owners are afraid to deal with the authority and laws, which they might not fully understand.

On the most common opportunities for ethnic small businesses:

Most ethnic businesses focus on food or art and crafts. As a result, you have seen some of the fusion, merging the cooking and cultures of the East and West.

On what these businesses means for Hawaii:

They provide cultural diversity for the state, and the diversity could provide a cultural experience for local Hawaii residents and visitors alike. Also, it provides the opportunity to gain first-hand experience for Hawaii companies by interacting with ethnic owners, i.e. from China, and learn how business is conducted there before committing serious capital, time and resources overseas.

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