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Aloha Spirit

Maui-made Ocean Vodka expanding operation after finding success on the world market

January 14, 2013

By NANEAL KALANI - Staff Writer (nkalani@mauinews.com) , The Maui News

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Having developed Maui-made Ocean Vodka into a successful brand over the last six years, the Smith family is now positioning the company for expansion with the addition of a new facility to streamline operations and allow the business to branch out in the luxury alcoholic beverage market.

"It's always been the goal to create a value-added agricultural product that had staying power and could compete globally and support the local economy, and over the last six years we've developed Ocean into that brand," said founder, President and CEO Shay Smith. "That success has allowed us to put this expansion in place."

Ocean Vodka is made on Maui using deep-sea, mineral-rich water from off of the Kona coast and locally grown organic sugar cane. The product is certified organic by the USDA.

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The Smith family, founders of Maui-made Ocean Vodka...



"We utilized the last six years to develop and perfect the brand and message, and now we're being able to put the home base to the brand, so to speak," Smith, 35, said.

He said that the family-run business has secured an 80-acre site in Kula below the Surfing Goat Dairy, where it will relocate all operations - supply and production, farming, distillation, manufacturing, marketing and sales.

Ocean's new distillery and facility will be fully powered using solar photovoltaic panels.

Shay said that the company is transitioning over operations from an existing Kahului facility and anticipates opening in Kula in April, when the public will be invited to tour the farm and a new visitors center.

"We're creating a really world-class showcase for people to see," Smith said, adding that visitors will have an opportunity to learn about organic farming and green manufacturing.

Smith describes the family-run company's six employees as jacks-of-all-trades.

"We built the new building ourselves. We make it, bottle it, and we're an all-around hardworking local family," he said. "It's nice to be able to put out an agricultural product made on Maui that's spreading out across the country and world."

Ocean Vodka is distributed in 35 states and five countries. It also is the exclusive vodka served on all Hawaiian Airlines flights since 2007.

With the new facility, Smith said production capacity will increase to 200,000 cases annually, up from about 50,000 cases now.

"We're keeping busy, and we're not at capacity yet, but this expansion is in good time and helps us plan ahead," he said.

He noted that over the last three years, the company's revenues have "more than doubled in size and we continue to grow aggressively every year."

"With the new facility, we'll have the ability to expand. We're looking at playing with flavors, possibly as limited editions, and expanding possibly into gin and looking at whiskeys," Smith said.

* Nanea Kalani can be reached at nkalani@mauinews.com.

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