

# Rearview Mirror: Nuuanu YMCA once occupied Pali Longs and Safeway site

By Bob Sigall, Special to the Star-Advertiser · April 19, 2019

In January I began a series of articles I call “What Was There Before” — significant Oahu locations and what was on those sites in the past.

I’ve begun looking at old maps and newspaper archives and now have over 300 locations on the list. Here are three places and some of their interesting stories.

## Pali Longs and Safeway

Longs and Safeway opened on this site in November 1963. It was the fourth Longs in Hawaii (after downtown, Ala Moana and Kahala) and 24th in their California-Hawaii chain.

Back then all the Longs stores had logos. If they were in a shopping center, they used that mall’s logo. Sam Eason designed the Pali Longs logo, a tiki representing Mai-Ola, an ancient Hawaiian god of medicine. The tiki is still part of the entrance sign on Pali Highway.

Why are Longs and Safeways together at that location? Bob Skaggs, who began working for Longs in 1959, told me a marriage between the two founding families created that connection.

Marion Barton Skaggs established Safeway in 1915. His daughter, Vera Mai, married Joe Long, who started Longs with his brother, Tom. Safeway helped finance the first Longs store in 1938.

Before Longs and Safeway moved in, the Nuuanu YMCA occupied the site.

The Nuuanu YMCA opened in 1916 and was the first in the world to bring together four previously separate ethnic Y’s: Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Filipino.

The meeting rooms and cafeteria occupied what’s now the corner of the parking lot at Pali Highway and Vineyard Boulevard. Ewa of it was their pool, then their gym. Tennis courts surrounded those.

I told Longs manager Peter Harper about the YMCA, and he wondered if their pool was why the store has a water seepage problem in the back.

The YMCA pool was along Vineyard Boulevard, maybe 70 feet Ewa of Pali Highway. But an earlier map from 1914 shows a more likely culprit: Pauoa Stream once ran diagonally through the property, from the Vineyard/Pali corner to near the Kukui/Nuuanu corner.

Alvin Yee recalls that Pauoa Stream was above ground when he was young. “It was normally just a few inches deep. In the early 1970s it was covered over. It flows west, then underneath the Chinese Cultural Center’s Royal Kitchen and exits into Nuuanu Stream.”

Before the YMCA was built in 1914, insurance maps show many tenement homes and a few small businesses on the property, owned by the estate of Robert Love, who had founded Love’s Bakery. The YMCA bought the property for \$25,000.

Nearly 50 years later the Nuuanu Y’s buildings were in disrepair, and the streets needed to be widened. They moved across the street, and Longs, Safeway and a gas station moved in.

Walt Miyashiro believes the property was leveled then for easier parking, creating a 10-foot drop on the mauka-Diamond Head corner.

“I believe since the YMCA property was originally on a slope, they dug down to put the pool and gym on level ground. When they put in the shopping center, they had to dig down even more to get the whole property on a large, flat surface.”

## Nico’s Kailua restaurant

Nico's at Pier 38 has opened a branch at 970 N. Kalaheo Ave. in Kailua. Nico's Kailua began in 2017. Its owner is Nico Chaize, who was born in France.

Nico's specialty is seafood, such as sesame- crusted opah in a spicy red coconut curry sauce, Cajun ono and pan-seared ahi topped with a herb coconut cream sauce.

In researching the location, I found several restaurants have been there over the years. From 2001 to 2016 it was Pinky's Pupu Bar & Grill, named for Charles "Pinky" Nolan.

Pinky's Pupu Bar & Grill was a neighborhood, family- style restaurant overlooking Kawainui Canal. Its pupu menu covered such basics as sashimi, pork ribs, Buffalo wings and egg rolls. Entrees included beer-can chicken, fish tacos and prime rib.

Prior to 2001 the Yum Yum Tree was there (from 1983-2000). This was part of a chain that was named after the 1963 Jack Lemmon movie, "Under the Yum Yum Tree."

They featured pies and were similar to California- based Vi's Pies. Their first restaurant was in Kahala (now Chili's), and at one time they had six branches.

Yum Yum Tree built the current Nico's building, Kailua businesswoman Laverne Crawford told me.

Pinky's Broiler was there from 1962 to 1978. "Pinky" Nolan, wife Ginny and their five kids all worked there and served charcoal-broiled steaks, smoked ribs, lobster, mahimahi and other entrees with an all-you-can-eat salad bar for \$2.75 to \$5.50.

Former Honolulu Advertiser columnist Bob Krauss wrote that on one occasion a young, inebriated woman without clothes "flitted through the bar while her Marine boyfriend tried to capture her, using her muumuu as if it were a butterfly net." Krauss didn't say if he was successful.

Prior to that the Thailiana Hotel & Dining Room was probably the first business on the site, from 1953 to 1956. It was named for Realtor Thalia Comer, who built it with her Marine master sergeant husband, Elden. They claimed to be the "first and only hotel over the Pali." It had 34 rooms and mostly served the nearby Marine base.

Lyle "Gus" Guslander assumed control and changed the name to the Pali Palms Hotel around 1956. He already owned the Maui Palms and the Coco Palms on Kauai. "Pinky" Nolan and Bob Rinker took over in 1957. It was renovated into the Pali Palms Business Center in 1978.

### **Mandalay restaurant**

The third location we'll look at today is the Mandalay restaurant, which opened at 1055 Alakea St. (just makai of Alii Place) in 2005. The location has an interesting history that goes back over 100 years.

Mandalay was founded by Linda and Larry Chan, who owned Eastern Garden restaurant. They picked the name because they felt it was elegant.

Many islanders will remember Yong Sing restaurant, which occupied the site from 1967 to 2004. Numerous politicians, I recall, had fundraisers there since it was convenient to both their legislative and law offices.

Yong Sing means "city of the ram." It opened in 1967, the Year of the Ram. Yong Sing was a small city in Canton that raised rams and was famous for its excellent hospitality and fine cooking. Its chefs were in high demand across China.

From 1958 to 1966 the tenant was the Theatrical Equipment & Supply Co. It sold costumes, hats, wigs, ballet shoes, tap shoes and other stage accoutrements.

Before that it was Calypso Joe's Theatre Restaurant, around 1956. "Calypso Joe" (Bill Matons) was a well-known dancer in the decade after World War II. The restaurant was operated by Marian Harada, who owned Dot's in Wahiawa, Calypso Joe and his dance partner, Coco Te.

From 1947 to 1956 Stewart's Alakea Pharmacy was there. Robert Stewart opened his first pharmacy in Kaimuki around 1931 and had over a half-dozen on Oahu. Stewart's Alakea also had a coffee shop, cafeteria and toy store on the site.

During World War II the Central Identification Bureau occupied 1055 Alakea St. If you needed a pass to get on a military base or any restricted area, you had to get it there.

From 1919 to 1930 the Von Hamm-Young Co. sold cars and trucks on the site.

The earliest commercial tenants I could find were, from 1912 to 1914, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin offices and the Federal Telegraph Co. It was the place to go to send telegrams. Before that the property was private dwellings.

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## WHAT CAME BEFORE?

If you recall what was on a particular site or have a question, send me an email.

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