

REAL ESTATE

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Hawai'i Edition | Premiere

A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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Most of the Net

Dean Otto
Sakamoto Properties

His Magic Carpet Ride Lands in Kapalua

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By Rose Estrada

Each morning, Dean Otto wakes up with a smile on his face. Why shouldn't he? He lives and works in one of the most beautiful places in the world — welcome to West Maui. The pinnacle of this area has to be, without question, Kapalua, which just happens to be Otto's workplace. This upscale community is home to the season-opening PGA Tour's Mercedes Championships, the magnificent Ritz Carlton-Kapalua Hotel, and some of the world's finest beaches. Otto, a successful broker who specializes in Kapalua and Premiere West Maui Properties, is a self-proclaimed real estate junkie. One of the true passions of his work is to assist and educate his clients on the local real estate market. "I attribute the success I've experienced in my particular market to the fact that my clients know they can trust me and that I treat

everyone involved in the transaction with respect," says Otto. He continues with, "The bottom line is, take care of business with integrity and the business will come." Otto does admit that he is particularly motivated by the art of selling and contract negotiations, and his clients can attest to the fact that he is very good at it. With a forty-million-dollar volume through the third quarter of 2004, Dean Otto is definitely doing something right.

Anyone who has worked with Otto will tell you without a moment's hesitation that he has a deep sense of commitment to his work and is an overall pleasure to do business with — he is a mover and a shaker. Add to all of this the fact that Otto enjoys his chosen profession. "I do it not only for the monetary compensation, I love what I do. I have a positive impact on my clients and

Dean taking a moment from his busy schedule to enjoy beautiful Kapalua.



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Dean enjoys playing golf. Here he is pictured on the signature 5th hole of Kapalua's Bay Course.

that gives me a great sense of fulfillment and satisfaction,” says Otto. His expertise and knowledge rank him among one of the top professionals in the local real estate industry. When asked what advice he has for Realtors just starting out, Otto quickly responded, “Find your niche, establish yourself as the expert in that particular area, and don’t be afraid to make mistakes. People won’t judge you harshly for making mistakes; they judge you by how you respond and handle those mistakes.” Otto continues by saying, “You should always remember to use your experience to your client’s advantage. Remember who you are working for.”

Soft-spoken and polite, it doesn’t take more than a few minutes in Otto’s presence to sense the passion and dedication that lies beneath his easygoing demeanor. Otto, and 10 other West Maui Realtors, have teamed up to create AIM — the Alliance to Improve West Maui. The initial goal for AIM is to provide 1.5 million dollars in funding for the Maui Preparatory Academy.

With extraordinarily driven and successful people, it may take

I truly care about my clients and treat them like I would want to be represented. Never burn bridges.

finding out where they have been to find out how they come to be where they are today. In order to do just that, one must go back to 1984, when Otto was a 22-year-old wayward rugby player. Here we find the beginning of the magic carpet ride that has landed Otto in Kapalua.

Born to Willie and Hazel Otto on March 4th, 1962, in Durban, South Africa, Otto couldn’t be further from home. If you would have asked him several years back if he ever expected to live in one of the most geographically desirable places on the globe, he probably would have shrugged his shoulders and replied, “If I happened to find myself there at the time.” Otto now calls Maui home, and he will be the first to tell you that his new home has been most gracious to him.

As a young man, Otto started his great adventure by entering the military, which in his native Africa is a mandate for young men. He spent 18 months fighting in a war in Namibia to deter the spread of communism from Angola that claimed 1,800 lives in the first year alone. “You grow up fast when you’re faced with life-and-death situations,” Otto states. “I remember donating blood for the injured and seeing death on a daily basis.” Otto also grew up keenly aware of the problems of apartheid. Although he has never supported the government’s position, he has seen

Dean helped us find our current home, a process that required considerable research and planning. Dean did this with his superior knowledge of the West Maui area. His exceptional skills in managing the buying and selling process, and his special brand of diplomacy when troubleshooting and solving tough problems only begin to describe the value Dean adds. Over the years, he has repeatedly taken on countless challenges that go above and beyond the demands of the normal real estate transaction. Dean practices the true aloha spirit.

—Melinda Rockwell and Shan Steinmark

the effect this has had on his country. In spite of the suffering and social turmoil Otto has witnessed throughout his youth, he has somehow managed to remain unjaded. Perhaps this is why

Otto, at 42 years old, has lived every day of his life to the fullest. He has been presented with one wonderful opportunity after another. Anyone can be presented with opportunity, but only a few will ever actually take the steps necessary to bring them to their fullest potential. Otto recognizes that even though doors are opened for you, you must be willing to walk through and take the necessary steps toward success.

Otto's magic carpet ride landed him in Newark. He and a friend believed they had reached their final destination — New York. Being new to the States and not having yet mastered the accent, they could not understand why people were emphasizing that they were in "Newark" which is exactly where they wanted to be — "New York." Apparently, all was not lost in the translation and thus a new adventure begins to unfold.

As he continues to recount his story, he eases back into his chair and looks away with a smile on his face. You can immediately sense that going back to this time in his life conjures up fond memories. He starts his story by saying, "You know, I had no intentions or goals set on going to college. I didn't even have the money. But, it's interesting how things worked out."

While visiting a cousin in Eugene, OR, Otto was spotted by a University of Oregon assistant coach while he practiced rugby

Dean with his family: wife Michelle, son Troy and daughter Cassidy.

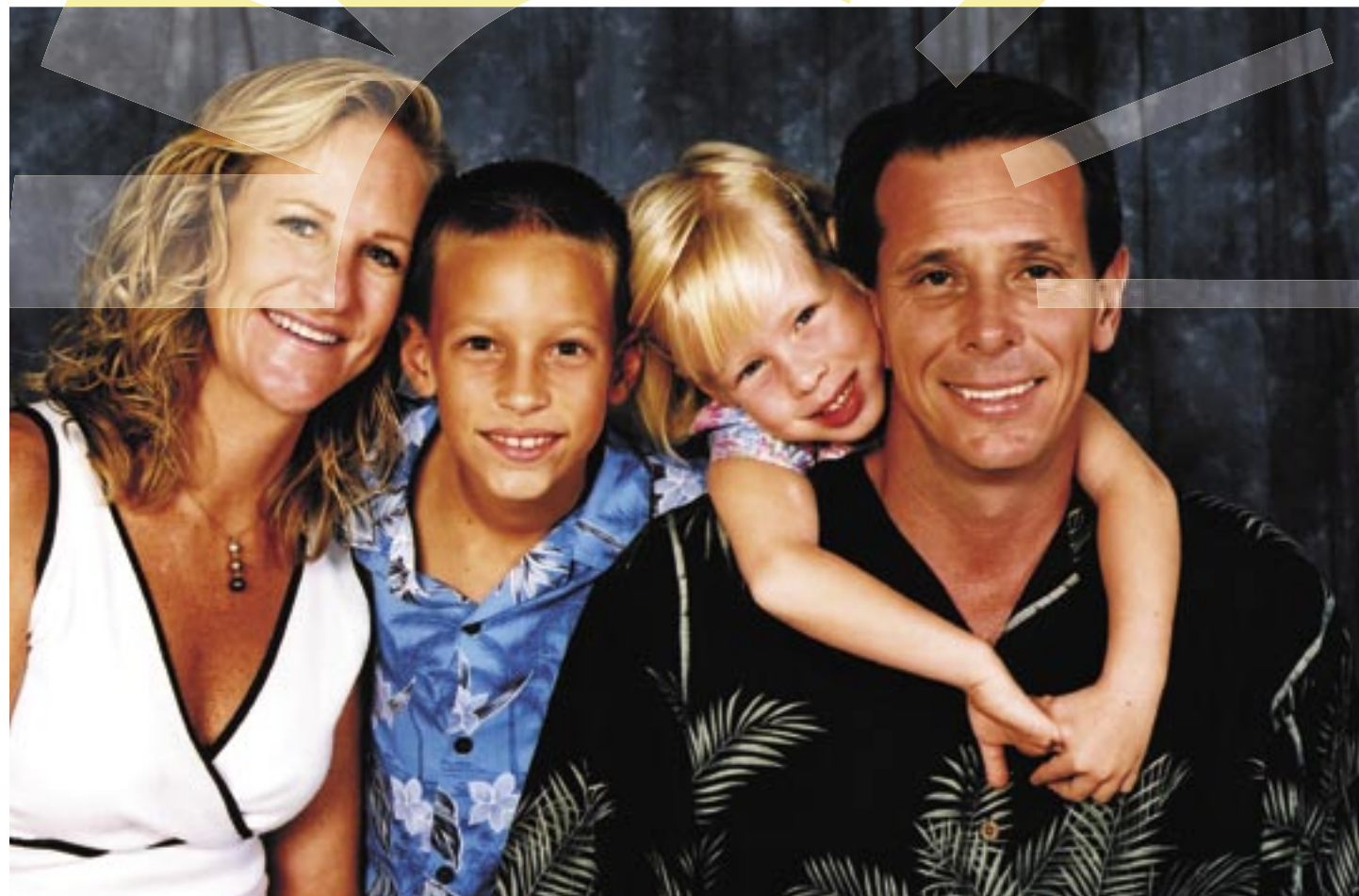


PHOTO BY STEVE BRINKMAN



Dean, #25, kicking a field goal for the University of Oregon.

kicks in a park. Oregon was coming off successive 2-9, 2-8-1, and 4-7 seasons, and the Ducks were desperate for a kicking game, especially a kick-off man who could get the ball to the end zone. Three days before the Ducks' 1984 opener against Long Beach State, head coach Rich Brooks gave Otto a tryout. In the Long Beach game, a 28-17 Oregon victory, three of Otto's five kick-offs landed in the end zone. He had seen a total of one American football game live and that was the one he had just played. The next day, Brooks offered him a four-year scholarship. In a 1984 *Sports Illustrated* story about the Ducks' startling 4-0 start that year, Otto was quoted as saying, "Wednesday before the first match, I decided to have a go. They were pretty keen to have me, actually."

Otto tells of being sent home early from practice to watch a college football game on ESPN. "I had no idea what the rules were," Otto said. "My coaches told me to watch TV, and especially what the kick-off guy did." Otto watched a number of football games and obviously learned enough that day to slam his first kick-off into the end zone. Otto soon realized that there was still one very important lesson to be learned, one that he would not soon forget. Otto grimaces as he recounts the experience, "The first time I kicked off, I didn't know what was going on.

I had no idea what to do, so I kicked the ball up into the air, and was watching the ball, watching my teammates and going 'yahoo!' It was a great kick, but the next thing I know some guy blindsides me and just about breaks my jaw. That was the last time I saw one of my kick-offs."

Otto was the Ducks' kick-off man and long field goal kicker for three years. Otto made a pair of 53 yarders that still rank fourth on the all-time Oregon list for length. He went on to graduate from Oregon in 1989 with a communications degree. Most importantly, Otto met and fell in love with his wife, Michelle Wilmore, who also attended Oregon and graduated with a degree in business. Born and raised on Maui, Michelle has been a stealth support system for her husband. She has chosen to remain at home and care for the couples' two children, Troy, nine, and Cassidy, four.

While Otto is dedicated to his profession, his first priority remains his family. "You have to find a healthy balance between your work and family. Kids

grow up so fast, you have to cherish every moment you have. Before you know it they'll be grown with families of their own," says Otto. As busy as life can get for the Ottos, they make certain that they take time away from it all to enjoy each other — just the family. One of the favorite family vacation destinations is Disneyland.

Although Otto grew up in a country divided by apartheid and witnessed the brutalities of war as a young man, he has managed to remain optimistic and upbeat about life. When given an opportunity, Otto took each and every one to its full potential. He is successful in his field of choice, he has the respect of his colleagues and peers, and he has the support of a loving family. When you meet this charismatic, well-spoken, mild-mannered man, one can immediately recognize that his words and actions are well thought out and that he draws from wisdom far beyond his years.

One can only wonder what is next for Dean Otto. One thing is certain — it has definitely been a magical carpet ride. ■