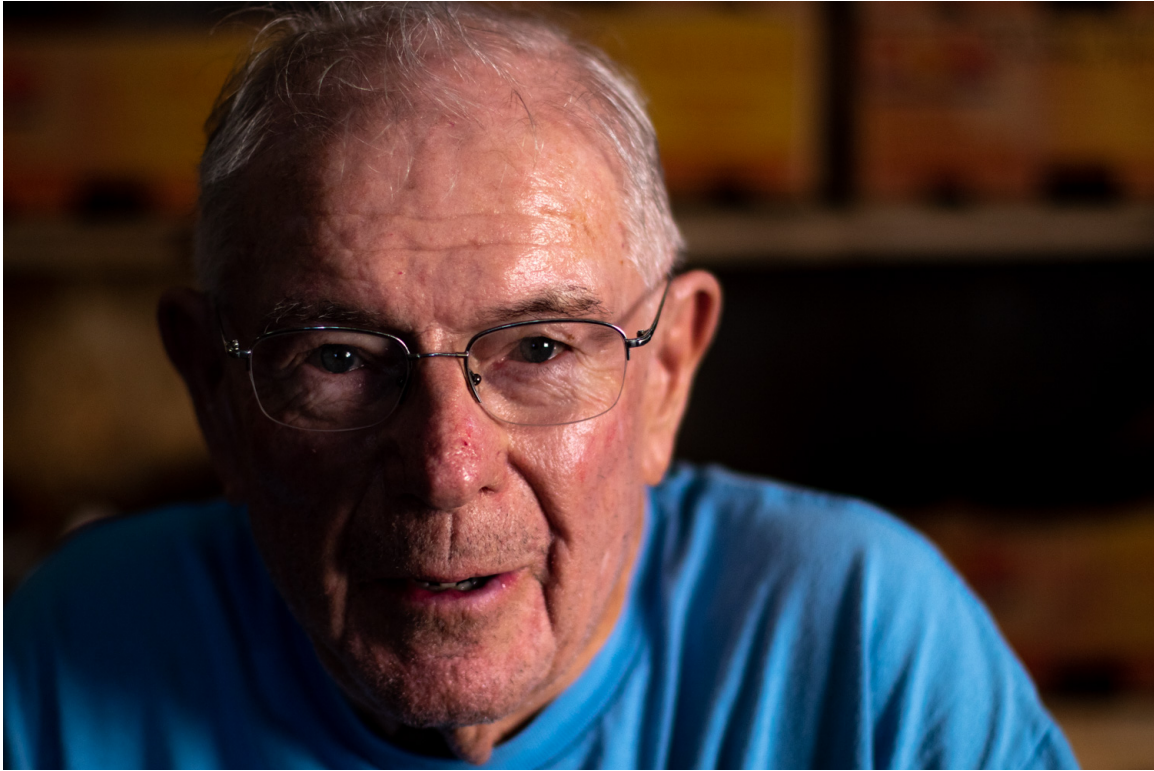


A Short History of the Honolulu Men's Shed

By Howard J. Wolff



Glenn Sears, age 86, founder of the first Men's Shed in the United States

Glenn Sears was born and raised in Hawaii but lived around the world for 40+ years. He moved back to Hawaii with his wife Mary, after living in the Colorado Rockies where they built their 4,000-square-foot house and a 1,000-square-foot woodworking shop.

Moving into a 1,000-square-foot condo in Honolulu, Glenn discovered that all of his previous friends had either died or moved away. He found himself feeling bored and lonely, when Mary told him about an article she had read in the Rotary magazine about men's sheds in Australia.

Searching online for "men's sheds" in Honolulu, Glenn found nothing. So he searched "men's sheds in the US" and came up empty again. Glenn sought out the author of the article, who put him in touch with a representative of the Men's Shed movement in Australia, which had been around for decades. "We wondered when someone in the U.S. would contact us," they responded, and gave Glenn some history about the men's shed movement.

Glenn then showed up at the next Honolulu Rotary club meeting, explained the concept of a Men's Shed and announced, "I want to start a Men's Shed here in

Hawaii.” Four guys expressed interest—David Talbert, Jerry Taniyama, Jim Hoban, Jonathan Okabe—and, together with Glenn, they formed a steering committee.

By his own admission, Glenn knew nothing about starting a charitable nonprofit organization. But he was a quick learner. He was able to get 501(c)3 recognition by the IRS; sent in the requisite \$400; and, three weeks later, got the approval. He then sat down and wrote the constitution for what would become the Honolulu Men’s Shed Association.

Next up was to look for a space.

Honolulu Men’s Shed – first space (2015)

Glenn spent five months searching every place he could find that was empty and/or underutilized. He went to every senior center that was run by the state and finally found a tiny space (12’ x 16’) with sliding glass doors that opened onto an outdoor concrete deck. In its earlier incarnation, this space in a senior center had a small woodworking shop.

The steering committee members supplemented the available equipment with some of their own tools and spent a day cleaning up the space. They put up a sign as a way of starting to look for members. But an individual at the Hawaii Division of State Parks closed the place down one week later (presumably because of liability concerns).

Now the search was on for a second home.

Honolulu Men’s Shed – second space (2016)

The men’s shed found a place to meet that was offered by Makiki Christ United Methodist Church, where eight or nine members gathered once a month. Clearly, this was not an optimal long-term solution.

Honolulu Men’s Shed – third space (2017)

In February of 2017, Brickwood Galuteria, a Hawaii State Senator whom Glenn had befriended, called to say, “Meet me by Sand Island Bridge.” There they explored three big warehouses with no water or electricity, which were scheduled to be torn down in December.

One of the buildings seemed like a suitable temporary location for the men’s shed, but Glenn was told that Biki Bikeshare would be using some of the space for their equipment. Hearing the word “bike,” Glenn brought over 39 abandoned bikes from his condo, and Men’s Shed members started with the task of fixing them up.

Conditions in this building were not ideal, but the men made the most of it, adding a generator for electricity and using port-o-potties when nature called. Aware that the building was scheduled to be demolished by December 2017, Men's Shed members knew they had to find a new space.

Glenn asked, actually "begged," in his words, the folks at the State Harbor Division about the use of an appropriate space for this worthy organization.

Honolulu Men's Shed - fourth space (2018)

A kind property manager at the Harbors Division, who really liked the idea behind the Men's Shed, offered up a space in a warehouse at Pier 19 that could be utilized under two conditions:

1. The group would have to remove 28 tons of concrete in the form of an 8-inch-thick insulated refrigerator floor slab.
2. The Men's Shed would have to leave with one-month's notice, when it came time to tear the building down.

Cutting up and removing the concrete slab proved to be a huge, messy effort; but the now 40-something members of the Shed took on the task and completed it within a few months. Glenn contacted the president of Hawaiian Dredging (where Glenn had been working over five decades earlier), who volunteered to have the company haul away and dispose of the 28 tons of concrete.



The current home of the Honolulu Men's Shed at Pier 19

The first in the country

What was known for years as “Glenn’s Shed” is the first Men’s Shed in the United States. As of this writing, there are 19 sheds across the country. In 2019, Glenn took on a national role as board member of the US Men’s Shed Association, lending his knowledge, wisdom, and expertise to other start-ups and producing a quarterly newsletter.

Locally, the Honolulu Men’s Shed members (now numbering over 100) have been electing a president and board of directors annually. (Past presidents include Mick McAndrews, Jonathan Okabe, and Michael Trojan.) The group continues to enjoy and upgrade the more than 6,000 square feet of working space.

In the meantime, Glenn hasn’t stopped looking for other options. He hopes to secure a grant to purchase a permanent home for the Honolulu Men’s Shed.

Out of his personal search for connection with others, Glenn Sears (now 86 years young) has created an active and caring community of individuals who find the chance to work shoulder-to-shoulder and share heart-to-heart.