

## Micronesians Train Future Oyster Hatchery Technicians in Pohnpei

Aquaculture skills training in remote areas of the CTSA region is often conducted by outsiders, but for the first time, in Pohnpei, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), local Micronesians are in charge of training future technicians at the black pearl oyster hatchery at Nett Point.

When Martin Hagilmai and Justino Smith joined the pearl oyster culture team on Pohnpei led by Masahiro Ito, a pearl oyster expert from Australia, the former office workers had no expectations of being called upon to train other Micronesians who would later join the team.



Martin Hagilmai at the Nett Point Hatchery on Pohnpei, FSM.

Martin Hagilmai graduated from Palau Community College, and then worked for four years for the FSM National government. After taking early retirement from his position, he looked around for another type of work.

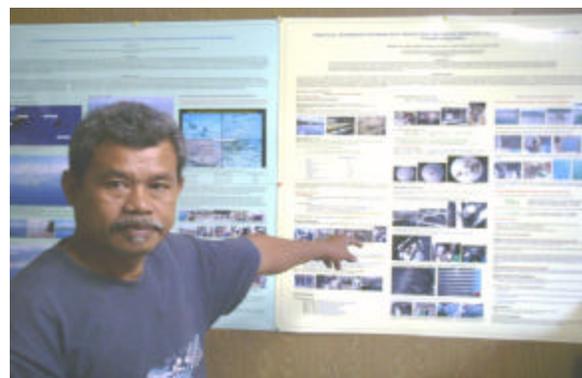
Dr. Singeru Singeo, at the College of Micronesia in Pohnpei, asked Hagilmai if he would like to join Ito's team as a hatchery technician. Hagilmai did not have any previous knowledge about pearl hatcheries, or much background in chemical and biological related studies, but he accepted the position for the income it would provide to support his family.

As a new hire, Hagilmai carefully followed Ito's instructions. He remembers running like crazy to accomplish his assigned work correctly. He sometimes felt like he was back in school, dreading a scolding from his teacher. "I learned a lot from Mr. Ito," he said. "He's a strict instructor, but he taught me everything he knew about working in the pearl oyster hatchery."

Hagilmai's training and persistence have brought him good results, and he is grateful for being given the opportunity to become the first Micronesian to acquire his specialized skills. Hagilmai has run the Nett Point hatchery independently since 2004. He now uses his training and experience to train newly hired Micronesians to work in the hatchery.

Like Hagilmai, his co-worker and fellow Micronesian, Justino Smith, did not have a background that prepared him for work in a pearl oyster hatchery. After high school, Smith attended FSM Agriculture College in Palau in 1978, and went to Missouri Valley College in 1994, to study Human Services.

Smith worked at the Cooperative Extension Service Unit in FSM for 20 years, until his supervisor ordered him to join Ito's team at the oyster hatchery.



Justino Smith at the Nett Point Hatchery

After one week at the new job, Smith said he had wanted to quit because it was so hard, with so many challenging things to learn and do every day. One advantage for Smith was that he found it easy to adapt to Ito's style of training and instruction, because his father had also worked with the Japanese.

Smith says that he's glad that he stayed with the job, because in addition to improving himself and overcoming his weaknesses, he is helping Hagilmai to train the newly hired

Micronesian technicians to work at the pearl oyster hatchery.

Having Micronesians train local workers as technicians for the black pearl hatchery on Pohnpei is seen by many as a positive step in the development of aquaculture in CTSA's region. In addition to increasing the knowledge base and expertise of the local work force and contributing to the economy, projects such as these also benefit from the more stable social ties of the trainers and workers within their island communities.