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MENA – A home grown success story!



In the last issue of *Pasifika Business Watch*, we featured a testimonial from Michael Savins of Tarawa, Kiribati, whose companies namely, Atoll Beauties and Kiricraft Central Pacific, export clams to Europe as well as pleasure crafts to Australia. Lessons learnt from such live practical experiences are anticipated to support the aspirations of existing and potential businesspeople throughout the region. Positive feedback received on Michael's experiences has encouraged us to feature another success story. This time, we will focus on four entrepreneurial sisters, who have chosen to relocate from their New Zealand home to do business in Samoa, where they are ably supported by their mother. Read on then for highlights of the endeavours of this enterprising group of young Samoan businesswomen.

MENA was literally conceived "at home". Mena, the matriarch behind this budding enterprise, is a tailor/dressmaker who worked from home making clothes for her growing daughters, relatives and friends.

Eight years later, Mena and her daughters launched their label, MENA, in Samoa. They began with very traditional hand-printed two-pieces or *puletasi* worn by Samoan women for both work and formal wear. However, with four designer sisters namely, Agnes, Jackie, Gina and Charlene, keen to take MENA to a global market, recent collections have emerged to include more contemporary evening gowns and cocktail dresses to cater to the more mainstream market. The Polynesian staple of vibrant lush colours and traditional motif prints is still evident in their designs.



The enterprising Loheni sisters: (L-R) Gina, Charlene, Jackie & Agnes

In 2007, the MENA label was officially introduced to the New Zealand market at the Air NZ Fashion Week. They have also promoted their label around the South Pacific by doing fashion shows in Hawaii, Rarotonga and Fiji. Their designs have featured in the NZ-made movie *Sione's Wedding*, which has indeed helped to market MENA as bridal wear designers as well.

The Loheni sisters were all born and raised in Auckland with many family trips to their parents' homeland of Samoa. In the years leading up to the establishment of the MENA label, two of the sisters had been residing in Samoa with their mother, Mena. Years later, the two remaining sisters followed and moved to Samoa as well after both had done two-year OE stints in the UK.

Growing up with a tailor mum meant of course that the sisters could always get her to stitch up their own designs from a young age. Neither of them though could have foreseen that years later they would all end up being in business together. For the sisters, MENA satisfies their individual interest in art, design, fashion & marketing. For their mother, it's enough just to be involved and to watch all her daughters succeeding together.

Jackie was a resource person for the Regional SMMIE Forum held in Samoa last October, where she shared their family business experiences during the Forum's session on "Young and Restless – Pacific Entrepreneurs". For more on MENA and their exciting range of designer products, please contact info@mema.co.nz



Family Affair: The sisters with their Dad, Fepuleaia and Mum, Mena