

# Ex-Mahalo Air executive sues interisland carrier

□ The former chief operating officer charges race and age discrimination

By Russ Lynch

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Mahalo Air Inc.'s former chief operating officer, David Hirsch, has charged the new airline with race and age discrimination. A state court lawsuit filed yesterday also claims that he was falsely accused of taking kickbacks from aircraft vendors.

Hirsch claims he was told that he couldn't expect long-term employment because he wasn't Japanese.

Mahalo Air Chairman Robert

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Iwamoto called Hirsch's complaint false. "It's lies. There's no truth to it," Iwamoto said. "He has nowhere to go and nothing else to do."

The suit filed by Hirsch's attorney Jerry Hiatt says Iwamoto told Hirsch that he was too old for the job and Hirsch said he didn't quit, as Mahalo told people, but was fired and wasn't paid money owed to him.

Hirsch, who earlier had operated cargo airlines in the islands, said his relationship with Iwamoto goes back to mid-1992, when Iwamoto proposed that Hirsch merge his Hutchinson Air cargo carrier with another interisland cargo operation controlled by Iwamoto.

Later that year, Hirsch said, Iwamoto talked to him about starting an interisland passenger airline.

Hirsch claims he worked hard from that point on to get Mahalo

Air off the ground, arranging for aircraft and fuel and the operating arrangement with Empire Airlines, which allowed Mahalo to fly while waiting for certification.

Hirsch accepted the Mahalo post in June and in July Iwamoto promised him a salary of \$72,000 a year, Hirsch said. On Sept. 25, six days before Mahalo started flying, he was fired by Michael Nekoba, Mahalo chief executive officer, the lawsuit said.

Hirsch said he was paid \$12,000 in salary and a \$10,000 bonus. He claims Mahalo owes him more salary and unpaid amounts from Iwamoto's earlier lease of planes from Hutchinson.

Hirsch also claims he was told not to hire some non-Japanese females who applied for jobs as flight attendants.