

Mahalo hit with bias suit

Ex-officer sees race, age barrier

By Greg Wiles

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The former chief operating officer of Mahalo Air Inc. has sued the company, alleging racial and age discrimination as well as failure to pay his salary.

David Hirsch, who helped in planning for the new airline, is asking for an amount to be determined at trial. The suit also names Robert Iwamoto Jr., Mahalo chairman, and Mike Nekoba, Mahalo chief executive officer, as plaintiffs.

Neither Iwamoto, Nekoba or Mahalo's attorney Gregory



Sato could be reached yesterday for comment.

The lawsuit filed by attorney Jerry Hiatt alleges that

Hirsch

Hirsch had worked since October 1992 in planning for Mahalo Air, which began interisland service Oct. 11.

The suit said he prepared the business plan and made numerous contributions to the company, including the idea of contracting with Empire Airlines to operate Mahalo Air flights while Mahalo Air Inc. pursued its government certification.

The lawsuit said that in September Nekoba falsely accused Hirsch of taking kickbacks from aircraft vendors. It also said Iwamoto told Hirsch that he was too old to hold a position with the company and that because he was not Japanese he could not expect long-term employment.

The suit further alleges that Iwamoto told Hirsch his not being from Hawaii hindered the company's prospects and that Iwamoto directed Hirsch to not hire certain non-Japanese females because of their race.