

HAWAII SBDC SUCCESS STORY - EAST HAWAII CENTER

POKE MARKET

Poke Market LLC, a poke bowl and roll concept, serves as the culinary expression of Chef Ernie Gray's collective professional experiences and travel. The establishment differentiates itself from local offerings by serving elevated poke bowls (think de-constructed sushi in a bowl), as well as unique menu items such as the burrito poke and sushi cakes. During a four-month market test at the Hilo Farmer's Market kitchen, Poke Market earned \$25,000 in gross revenue while open only 2 days a week.

Chef Ernie Gray is an award-winning, classically-trained chef who attended the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. He has over 17 years of experience working in professional kitchens from Hawaii to New York including well-established local eateries such as: Nobu, New York, California Rockin Sushi, Uncles, Gyotaku, Sushi San, Rakuen and Sansei in Honolulu.

Based on the growing popularity of the poke trend in Hawaii as well as in the Continental U.S. and abroad, the positive public response to Chef Gray's unique flavor profiles, and with the help of his business partner, Mariah Williams, AINS, CIIP, CPRIA, an experienced front of house, restaurant management, and insurance professional, they recently opened a brick-and-mortar location in downtown Hilo. Poke Market targets a diverse mix of individuals in the Hilo community with their cold, pre-prepared food; drawing both the moderate individual looking for a healthy meal as well as the discriminate local-foodie or tourist accustomed to a refined, culinary point of view.

Poke Market is quickly growing and expanding its presence through targeted marketing of its catering capabilities with special order sushi cakes and participation at special events to continuously brand their products. With help from the Hawaii Small Business Development Center and a lot of hard work from the owners, the sky is the limit for Poke Market!

