

Founder of medical device maker shared his talents with Hawaii

By Susan Essoyan
sessoyan@staradvertiser.com

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Earl Elmer Bakken, inventor of the first wearable, battery-powered pacemaker and co-founder of Medtronic Inc., embraced his motto of "live on, give on, dream on" when he moved to Hawaii in 1989.

He died Sunday at age 94 of natural causes at his home at Kiholo Bay on Hawaii island, having shared his pioneering vision for community health and his drive to do good with his adopted island.

"His philanthropy was certainly significant, but beyond that, it was just his heart for this place and the people here," said Susan Maddox, executive team leader for Friends of the Future, a non-profit based in Kamuela. "He was a guide and a mentor, and he saw things always as possibilities."

Among his many projects on Hawaii island, Bakken helped launch and served as president of the board of North Hawaii Community Hospital, aiming to blend high tech and "high touch," drawing on Hawaiian, Eastern and Western approaches to healing.

Bakken's creativity has extended the health of countless people around the world — and even his own. Medtronic, the company he co-founded and led for four decades, is now the largest medical device company in the world, according to its chairman.



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Earl Bakken, an electronics repairman who started Medtronic Inc., one of the world's largest medical device companies, died Sunday at his home on Hawaii island. He was 94.

helping with construction to buying a CT scanner, she said.

In Kamuela town his legacy includes Tutu's House, a place to explore health and wellness and forge community ties, and Earl's Garage, where kids age 7 and up can learn by tinkering and discover how the world around them works, just as he did. Both are projects of Friends of the Future, a nonprofit that he led.

Born in Minneapolis on Jan. 10, 1924, to Florence and Osva Bakken, the young Bakken showed an early interest in cords, plugs and connections. After seeing the movie "Frankenstein" at age 8, he became fascinated with the idea of using electricity to restore life.

neer. Today the company employs 84,000 people in 160 countries and has annual revenue of more than \$29 billion.

Bakken was committed to education. He founded The Bakken Museum in Minneapolis, an education center devoted to the history of electricity and magnetism and their uses in the life sciences. He also was instrumental in creating the Pavek Museum of Broadcasting. And he and his wife founded the Earl and Doris Bakken Heart-Brain Institute at Cleveland Clinic, focusing on the interconnections between

"Earl was a true pioneer in health care and his vision of using technology to help people still inspires us today," Omar Ishrak, chairman and CEO of Medtronic, said in a statement. "His spirit will live on with us as we work to fulfill the mission he wrote nearly 60 years ago — to alleviate pain, restore health and extend life."

Bakken and his wife, Doris, moved to Hawaii island, where they had been married, upon his retirement at age 65 as senior chairman of the board of Medtronic in 1989. His gentle approach helped him forge friendships locally.

"He had a very humble, very unassuming, very engaging type of style where you immediately felt comfortable with him," said Cindy Kamikawa, president of North Hawaii Community Hospital. "He was never demanding, always looking at, 'What are your thoughts?'"

Over the years, his contributions to the hospital reached \$15 million, from

"I had an uncle who was an electrician, and he kept telling my mother, 'You've got to stop that child from playing with that electricity — he's going to kill himself,'" Bakken recalled in a tribute posted by Medtronic.

As a teenager he built a 5-foot-tall robot that could blink and speak. After high school Bakken served four years in the U.S. Army Signal Corp before enrolling at the University of Minnesota where he earned a bachelor's in electrical engineering in 1948 and continued with graduate studies.

Bakken co-founded Medtronic in 1949 with Palmer Hermundsliie, his brother-in-law, as a repair service for medical electronics in a small garage. In 1957 he created the first battery-operated, external pacemaker at the request of a heart surgeon after an infant died during a power outage.

In 1960 Medtronic commercialized an implantable pacemaker, among many medical devices it would pio-

ne two organs.

Through the Bakken Invitation, a global awards program he created in 2013, he honored those whose lives were extended by medical devices who had chosen to use that gift of time to benefit others.

Among Bakken's most treasured accolades were receiving title of Alii Kahuna Laau Lapaa from the Royal Order of Kamehameha I and an award from the Hawaiian Civic Club for outstanding service by a non-Hawaiian to the Hawaiian community.

He helped launch Five Mountains Hawaii and The Kohala Center and fostered Na Kalai Waa Moku o Hawaii, among many other organizations.

In addition to his wife, Bakken is survived by his sister Marjorie Andersen, sons Jeff and Bradley, daughters Wendy Watson and Pamela Petersmeyer, stepchildren Ramona West and David Marshall, 11 grandchildren, three step-grandchildren and eight step-great-grandchildren.

Burial will be private. A celebration of life in Hawaii will be announced at a later date. Donations are invited to causes he held dear.