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 COMMUNITY


Take it or leave it.

IMAGE: RICHARD MORSE

*A self-sustaining recycling system, but where are HI-5 recycling baskets coming from, anyway?*

BY RICHARD MORSE | JUN 29, 2011

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**QUOTED**

**In 2005, their HI-5 baskets started appearing in public places, randomly and anonymously, as if mischievous menehune were doing it.**

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**HI-5, EATING IN PUBLIC /** Eating In Public—the organization that's taken on the public HI-5 recycling challenge on Oahu—provides cheap and efficient handmade, wire mesh recycling cages throughout the Island. Their signs are familiar to most of us: HI-5. Take, Leave, Whatevas. The only clue as to where they come from is an obscure website called [[nomoola.com](#)]. The baskets are usually empty when you see them, which makes one wonder, are they working or not?



We think so.

The City and County of Honolulu grappled with the public HI-5 recycling problem for years. Under pressure from the community, they tried placing blue recycle barrels in public parks. But the public didn't exactly catch on, and those barrels collected more garbage than HI-5 containers. It was a

nuisance for park maintenance crews. "Forget it," they decided. A valiant effort on their part that just didn't work out.

Then along comes Eating in Public (EIP), approximately five years ago. The crude cages are, to some, a bit unsightly, but their beauty was in the basic concept, perfect for depositing redeemable beverage containers, and there's no mistaking them for rubbish barrels. No more uncivilized sifting through garbage for HI-5 collectors. No more guilty feelings about tossing your empty pop can into the trash. Problem solved.

Founded in 2003 by two local women—Gaye Chan and Nandita Sharma—EIP claims roots reaching back to 17th-century England, to a movement established by a group called "the Diggers," who, in the midst of political-economic nepotism, planted food crops in common (public) lands that were otherwise fallow or unused. They did it without permission from authorities, partly to demonstrate their contempt for government incompetence, but mostly in support of the dispossessed "commons." Free food for anyone was the basic idea.

"Free anything" runs against the grain of the capitalistic regime, even back then, so the Diggers were branded as anarchists and blackballed from the townships by the powers in place. But they were not forgotten. The Digger movement has since re-emerged—right here in Honolulu, where the EIP movement has revived the Digger torch.

Among their first projects, Sharma and Chan planted a "free-to-all" papaya patch on a weedy Kailua roadside. In the true spirit of the 17th-century Diggers, they have also planted free gardens in various places around Oahu. The women have set up a number of free stores on public and private lands around the Island. They didn't bother anyone for permission to do these things. They just did it...Digger style.

Their masterpiece, though, is perhaps a "Free Money Box" at one of their free stores near their home in Kailua. "I look in the box in the morning before I go to work, and there's 57 cents in there," says Chan in an interview, "When I get home I see 34 cents. Why? I don't know why."

In 2005, their HI-5 baskets started appearing in public places, randomly and anonymously, as if mischievous menehune were doing it. Since then, EIP has established a positive reputation in the community and has worked with local high schools and a long list of businesses around Oahu in helping to expand their recycling systems. The two women have been recognized locally, nationally and internationally for their imaginative approach to social solutions.

"We want to show that the commons still exist...that we can take care of each other while we take care of ourselves," says Sharma, in a presentation at *The Creative Time Summit*, held recently in New York City.

Sharma and Chan used their experience to encourage other people to make more of the simple HI-5 recycle baskets on their own and install them where they are needed, attaching a sign that says: "Take, Leave, Whatever..."

"Join us if you want." reads their message on the EIP website. "Or better yet, take our ideas and run with it. As far, smart and fast as you can."

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