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Bunker cave space for rent in Waikele

By [Andrew Gomes](#)
Advertiser Staff Writer

When Makaha residents Jan and Fred Untch needed a place to store household items, they considered several of the new self-storage facilities that seem to be popping up everywhere around O'ahu. Instead, they chose a cave.

The Untches were attracted to one of the latest — and most unusual — competitors in the self-storage development boom sweeping O'ahu. They rented space in a former Navy munitions bunker dug deep into the sides of Kipapa Gulch just west of Waikele Center.

A series of retrofitted bunkers branded as Waikele Self Storage is the creation of a partnership led by local publishing executive and entrepreneur Peter W. Cannon.

Cannon leased 23 of the tunnel-like bunkers late last year from a Navy contractor that made 128 bunkers at the former Naval Magazine Lualualei Waikele Branch available for rent last year. In recent months, Cannon methodically has been building storage compartments inside the caves.

So far, Cannon said about 300 storage lockers have been finished, of which about 140 have been rented. When construction is complete, he expects to have roughly 900 lockers ranging from 25 square feet to 300 square feet.

The operation is unconventional, but cheap by local standards.

"This is a good deal here," Jan Untch said, explaining that she compared self-storage companies and found Waikele



Peter W. Cannon, publishing executive and entrepreneur, opened Waikele Self Storage after leasing space at the former Navy munitions facility in Waikele. Bunkers were transformed into storage units.

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The names of U.S. battleships or aircraft carriers are stenciled above the doors of the converted bunkers at Waikele Self Storage.

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Self Storage prices as much as 25 percent lower than conventional storage facilities on the Island.

"It's different from normal storage, but it's adequate," Fred Untch added. "It takes care of our needs."

Prices for locker space range from \$80 for 25 square feet, to \$700 for 500 square feet at the cave facilities per month.

The 8-foot-high lockers are fairly standard steel compartments with roll-up doors, and the spaces maintain a relatively cool temperature without air-conditioning. Each bunker also is outfitted with a loading dock.

But every time a customer wants access to their unit, an employee must unlock a heavy steel door that seals off each bunker, then roll out and pull-start a gas generator to power lighting inside.

MILITARY THEME

Cannon is sprucing up the abandoned look of the bunkers with a Navy theme by painting each exterior door assembly gray and stenciling it with the name of a different U.S. battleship or aircraft carrier.

There are also plans to make the largely haole koa landscaping along the winding road between well-separated bunkers into more of a "park" setting.

Cannon said his partnership expects to invest \$800,000 in the operation, mainly from installing the storage partitions, removing blast walls and adding ramps and stairs.

But he expects a quick return on the investment by leasing bunker space for 35 cents a square foot a month and offering retrofitted space for roughly \$2 to \$3 a square foot a month.

Cannon said he has a five-year lease with an extension option, and that he'd like to lease more bunkers if they are still available in August 2007, when he expects to finish construction of his storage space.

RANGE OF TENANTS

There are 128 former munitions bunkers spread over 515 acres of Waikele and Kipapa valleys. The Navy is deeding the property to Ford Island Properties LLC under a contract in which the company is improving Navy housing and paying the government more than \$80 million for surplus land around O'ahu.

Ford Island Properties leased the former Waikele Naval Magazine to Hawaiian Island Development Co., which has leased many of the bunkers and yard space to a range of businesses including contractors, a fireworks distributor, wine merchant, car dealer and Cannon's group.

At Waikele Self Storage, facility manager Jenny Rodrigues said most customers are military personnel and civilian residents storing household items.

Cannon, who owns Hawaiian Resources Co. Ltd., a publishing firm that produces calendars, greeting cards and other material, said he was aware the self-storage industry considered O'ahu very undersupplied. So when he heard the bunkers were available, he saw them as an opportunity to get into the business.



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"It was built for storage, so storage is the most adequate use for the property," he said.

MORE SPACE

According to local real-estate appraisal and consulting firm Leshar Chee Stadlbauer Inc., there are 33 self-storage facilities on O'ahu, up from 24 five years ago. There are 18 more planned or under construction.

Leshar Chee Stadlbauer reports that national and local developers such as Public Storage Inc., The Lock Up and MW Group have responded to O'ahu's 2.03 square feet of self-storage space per person that compares with a national average of 5.54 square feet.

As a result, new facilities are under development in some interesting places, including waterfront property in Hawai'i Kai and the site of an old retail strip center on the edge of Waikiki.

Reach Andrew Gomes at agomes@honoluluadvertiser.com.

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