

# suburbanlife

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# Island Time

With a distinct Hawaiian influence and deep ownership roots at the Jersey Shore, **Mahalo Diamond Beach** offers an affordable resort experience in Wildwood Crest.

BY MATT COSENTINO

**T**he magic of the Jersey Shore tends to captivate visitors from a young age. Eustace Mita is certainly no stranger to its spell.

From the moment he was baptized at a Stone Harbor parish as an infant, Mita began a lifelong love affair with the region. Today, the hotelier is proud to welcome guests at numerous coastal properties to take in the same beautiful sights and sounds that have filled his summers for as long as he can remember.

Mita, the founder and owner of ICONA Resorts, and his team have transformed the landscape at the Jersey Shore by building luxurious, top-rated hotels from Avalon to Wildwood Crest and Cape May, not to mention the stunning condominium complex known as The Grand. Now they are further changing the game with their latest brand—Mahalo Resorts—geared toward families and promising a memorable experience that won't break the bank.

The first of these new resorts, Mahalo Diamond Beach, opened in June at the former site of the Regal Plaza Motel, making it neighbors of The Grand and ICONA Diamond Beach. Other Mahalo properties will soon follow, including a second in Wildwood Crest and another in Cape May.

"In Hawaiian, Mahalo means gratitude, and we're so grateful to be able to provide an oceanfront hotel experience at a price point that is affordable," Mita says. "It's an experience that we don't believe exists right



now in Cape May County. We saw it as an underserved market, and we're going to serve that market exclusively at Mahalo."

As Mita points out, Wildwood Crest has long been populated by economy motels, and these businesses rarely invest in upgrades because crowds are virtually guaranteed to return from one summer to the next. Mita wants to lead the way in creating an affordable resort experience, and no expense has been spared in renovating the property since it was purchased last year.

Mita's roots at the Jersey Shore run deep; his paternal grandfather owned a beach home in the 1920s, and his maternal grandfather operated hotels. Mita spent his teen years working as a busboy, waiter, and life-guard. As a real estate developer, he has always had an affinity for building beautiful properties from Cape May to Longport, because he feels a responsibility to uplift the area. He is pleased to see residents and other businesses benefit from Mahalo Diamond Beach and his other properties.

"It takes a hometown boy like myself and our company to risk that capital and do it, because our roots are there and we grew up there," he says. "I hope people will be glad that we took the risk to put a five-star hotel in a five-star town. If we don't do it, there's nobody behind us who's going to do it, because there hasn't been a new hotel built in 50 years. By the grace of God, we have the means to do it, we have the will to do it, and we're going to do it."

The Hawaiian theme extends past just the name at Mahalo, starting with the décor

in the lobby and a colorful tropical bird named Maui who talks to guests and is available for photos with arriving families. The rooms and suites are inspired by the islands, and the brand-new pool features a waterfall and play area for the kids.

When guests wish to move on from time in the sun, sand, and surf, the hotel provides shuttles to the Wildwood Boardwalk and beach cruisers to explore other parts of the island.

"We think the children will be so excited that they're going to thank Mom and Dad every year for this experience," Mita says. "Mom and Dad are going to say, 'We're only going to Mahalo from now on.' Then, when the children become adults, they can still go to Mahalo or they can go to ICONA."

Mita is proof that once the Jersey Shore gets a hold of someone's heart, it never lets go. Although he has traveled the world, he still finds the area to be a special place. He is excited to share it with the next generation through Mahalo Diamond Beach.

"My place of peace is Cape May County, whether I'm in Wildwood Crest, Cape May, Diamond Beach, Avalon, or Ocean City," he says. "We continue to put money back into these communities and into our buildings. It's been in my blood and for me this is an absolute dream come true." ■

➔ **Mahalo Diamond Beach**  
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[MahaloResorts.com](http://MahaloResorts.com)