

Visionary entrepreneur, restaurant owner, and Asian frozen food founder



Michael Tsao was born in Shanghai, China and moved to Hong Kong as a young boy. He immigrated to the United States at the age of 18 with \$100 in his pocket. He began working as a dishwasher in Los Angeles and eventually became the General Manager of Trader Vic's in the Beverly Hilton. During his tenure there, Trader Vic's became one of the Top 5 restaurants in the Los Angeles area.

In 1978, Tsao moved to Columbus, Ohio and became part owner of the Kahiki restaurant. He also owned and managed a 400 room hotel, a Chinese fast food chain, and a steakhouse over the next decade. In 1988, he became sole owner and helped lead the restaurant to numerous awards, including Five Star Diamond recognition in the Polynesian restaurant category. The Kahiki was also named as "One of the Top 100 Restaurants of the 20th Century."

In 1993, he led an IPO that made Kahiki a publicly traded company, using the funds to establish a 7,000 square foot frozen food plant next to the famous restaurant. In 2000, the company closed the restaurant after 39 years of operation, selling the property to Walgreens. The company moved into a 22,000 square foot frozen food plant in August 2000. Under his leadership, the company expanded its distribution of Kahiki brand frozen foods throughout the United States and into several foreign nations, growing to approximately \$19,000,000 in net sales at the end of its last fiscal year. Sales growth was dramatic and necessitated the move into a new 119,000 square foot frozen food plant in Gahanna, Ohio. The company recently completed the move into its new plant, which employs nearly 190 people today.

In 2004, the company was cited for having the highest percentage gain of any publicly traded stock in Central Ohio, rising over 190% for the year.

Michael Tsao died July 22, 2005, due to heart failure resulting from diabetes-related complications. Tsao is survived by his wife of 33 years, Alice, and two sons Tim and Jeff.