



Tom Dinell

DEC 9, 2025



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HAWAIIAN
MEMORIAL PARK MORTUARY
AT VALLEY OF THE TEMPLES

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Tom Dinell

DEC 9, 2025

Tom Dinell -- beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, uncle, educator, mentor, community leader, and longtime resident of Honolulu, Hawai‘i -- died peacefully at home on December 9, 2025, at the age of 97, surrounded by family.

Born in New York City on March 8, 1928, to Monroe and Judith Dinell, Tom was a lifelong learner. He earned his undergraduate degree from Brown University in 1948 and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Michigan in 1950. In 1964, he received a fellowship to study at the Harvard University Graduate School of Public Administration. Tom carried this passion for learning throughout his life and generously shared it with all who knew him.

After returning from the Army, Tom began a career with PAS as a consultant to State and County governments across the country. In 1957, he accepted a position with the new state of Hawaii in setting their first administrative budget. Two years later his young family made the islands their permanent home. He went on to serve in the State Legislative Reference Bureau, becoming its Director in 1964. Years later, following the restoration of ‘Iolani Palace, Tom delighted in showing visitors the basement office where he had once worked.

Tom then founded the Pacific Urban Studies and Planning Program at the University of Hawai‘i - - now the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) -- and served as department chair for more than 20 years. Even after stepping down, he continued teaching, ultimately becoming professor emeritus and conducting his final class at age 90. He also helped establish the Program on Conflict Resolution and the Distinguished Chair of Affordable Housing within the College of Social Sciences at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. His took immense pride in how DURP students went on to serve in government, nonprofit, and private sectors across Hawai‘i, the Pacific, Asia and throughout the nation, carrying forward his deep belief in ethical, community-centered planning grounded in social justice and compassion.



Obituary

Tom Dinell

Among his many honors, Tom was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Certified Planners in 2002 -- one of only fourteen in the state of Hawai‘i -- recognizing his significant contributions to the planning profession and to society.

From 1988 to 1996, Tom served as Director of Catholic Charities Hawai‘i, leading the organization with humility and a deep sense of mission. Under his leadership, Catholic Charities expanded its support for vulnerable families, kūpuna, immigrants, and individuals facing hardship. In 1995, he was tapped by Catholic Charities USA to convene a national committee that produced the influential position paper “Transforming the Welfare System”.

At age 88, Tom once again turned his vision toward the future, gathering a group of like-minded individuals to establish Trees for Honolulu’s Future, a nonprofit dedicated to expanding and protecting O‘ahu’s urban tree canopy. This work reflected the values that guided his life: care for community, responsibility to future generations, and hope expressed through action.


Tom will be remembered for his kindness, steady presence, and quiet ability to inspire others by example. He is preceded in death by his parents; his wife, Connie (Matheis) Dinell; his sister, Judy Nan (Dinell) Hacoheh; and his granddaughters, Alexandra Dinell and Sarah Dinell.

He is survived by his wife, Kristi Dinell; his children Margaret Chester (Robert), Helen Neff (Bill), David Dinell (Nancy), Mark Dinell (Brenda), Peter Dinell (Kim), Jean Dinell (Randy Huybers), Malia Lehman (John), and Daniel Dinell (Lynnette); and by numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, relatives, and friends in Hawai‘i and around the world.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Tom’s memory may be made to Trees for Honolulu’s Future (<https://treesforhonolulu.org>) or the University of Hawai‘i - Department of Urban & Regional Planning. (<https://give.uhfoundation.org/campaigns/63435/donations/new>)



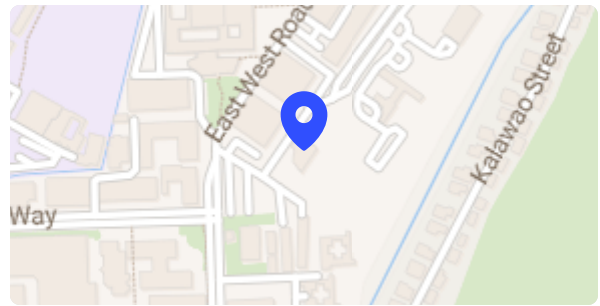
Celebration of life

 **Saturday**, February 28, 2026

 10:30 AM HST

 **Newman Center, University of Hawai'i-Manoa
Campus**

1941 East-West Road , Honolulu HI 96822





Tribute Wall

Tom Dinell



Malia Lehman shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.



February 22 at 7:48 AM



Malia Lehman shared 13 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.



January 14 at 11:54 AM



JL

John Lehman shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.



February 18 at 7:07 AM



BT

Bt posted:

Going to Hilo Airport with Tom working on a Hewlett Foundation grant where we almost missed the flight back home to Honolulu. We were so far from the terminal, but like two bats out of hell, we took off running like fools. Nearly out of breath, we saw that a door to one of the ramps leading to the tarmac was open...so off we went running again. And then we noticed security was running after us too, and wondered where they were going. We reached the gate in time but had so much explaining to do that we missed our flight. Intellectual rigor combined with slapstick humor. I laugh when I think about this, even all those years later...and this was just one Tom Dinell story. I love this man, for all the heart and humor, and soul he has shared with so many of us.

February 13 at 3:49 PM



MK

Mary Lou Kobayashi lit a candle in honor of Tom.

Tom was a consultant on various planning projects for the Hawaii State Office of Planning. He was a joy to work with. He skillfully led or facilitated groups to obtain ideas and recommendations to solve various planning problems and develop recommendations. He also had suggestions to help the groups move forward when they seemed to get stuck. But more than that he was a warm and friendly person.



January 14 at 11:54 AM



Malia Lehman shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

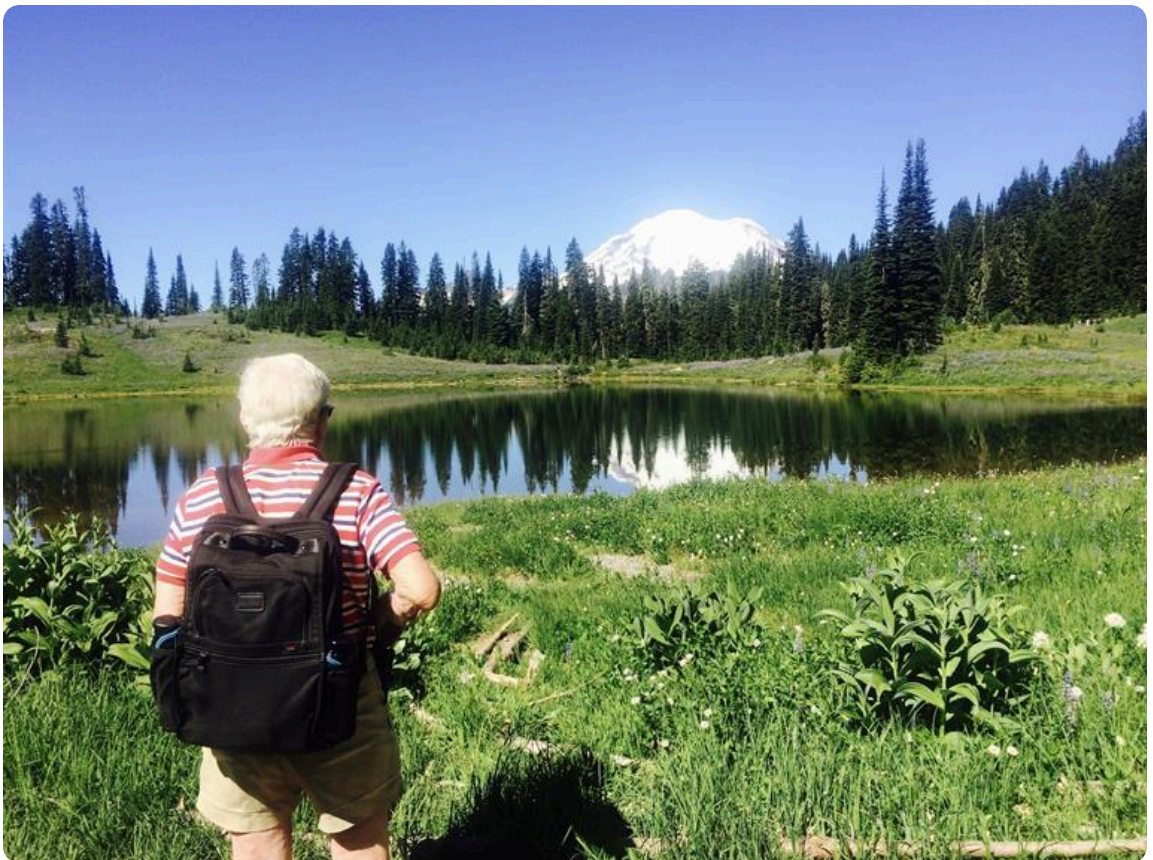
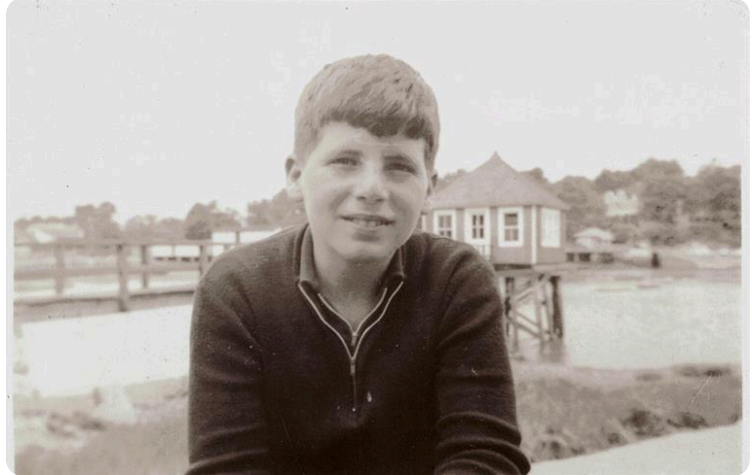
February 22 at 7:48 AM

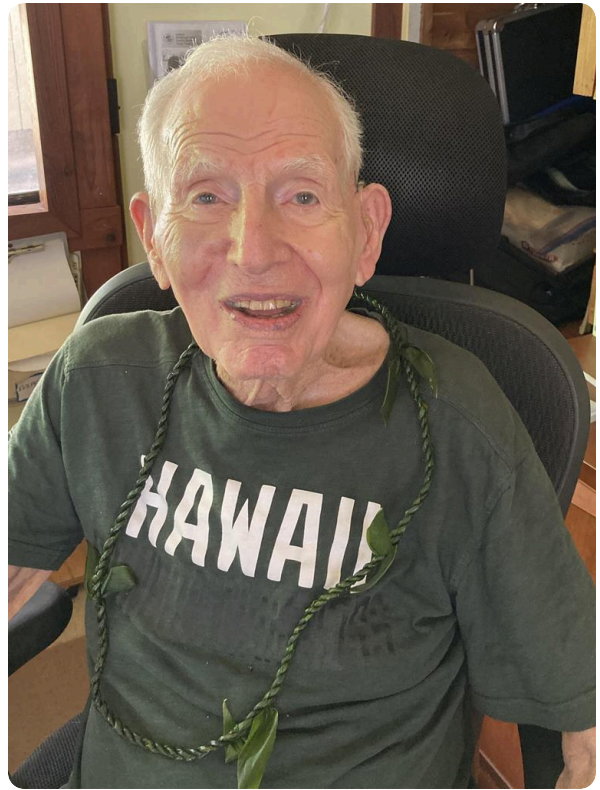
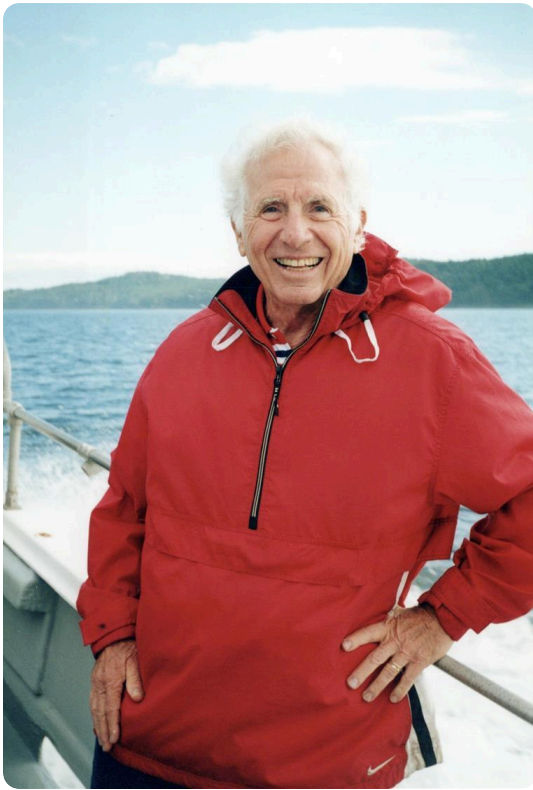




Malia Lehman shared 13 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

February 21 at 7:36 PM





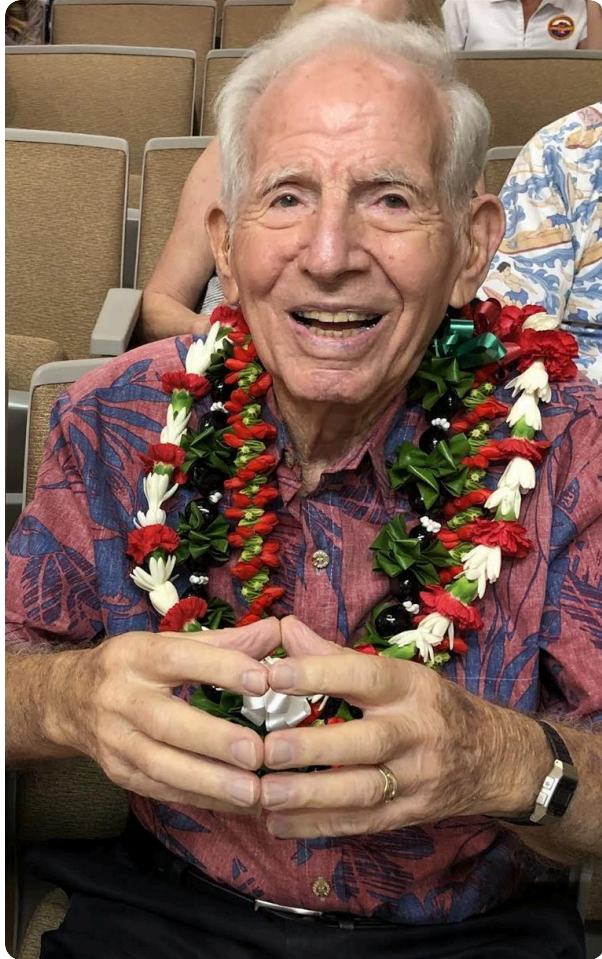






John Lehman shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

February 18 at 7:07 AM





Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Tom by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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