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20 for the Next 20: People to Watch 2014

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Thomas Lee

VP for Development, Hawaii Region,

Hunt Companies

Age: 37

Ask Thomas Lee where he's from and his response is, "all over the place."

He's not kidding.

"I was born in Korea, but we moved to Long Island, New York, then to Syracuse, where my dad went to school," recalls Lee. "Then my dad read that Irvine, California, was the best place to raise kids so we moved there until I was in 10th grade, but I finished high school in Beaverton, Oregon."

Lee returned to California to attend the University of California, Davis. After earning his bachelor's degree in managerial economics in 1999, he went to work for Robertson Stephens, a San Francisco boutique investment bank.

"I got laid off in 2001 due to the dot-com meltdown," says Lee. "Everyone knew it was coming and it was a sign of the times. I have images of being escorted out of the building carrying my box of belongings. I remember looking across the street and seeing someone else in the same boat, carrying a box, too. Hundreds of people were getting laid off each day at the time."

After a few odd jobs, Lee moved back to his parents' home in Oregon "to help my dad, who was designing and building homes," he says. "I thought it was a good idea, so I moved back and enrolled in a construction management program at a local community college."

Lee moved to Honolulu to join Hunt in 2006, managing projects, including the redevelopment of the Waterfront at Puuloa in West Oahu and the restoration and stabilization along the Iroquois Point shoreline. He has been through the ups and downs of the industry.

"Thomas has been an integral part of our team through some tough recessionary times," says Steve Colon, president of Hunt Development Group's Hawaii Division. "But it's more than what he does for

our company that makes him a leader. He's firmly committed to raising awareness of sustainability and preserving local resources. He wants to make Hawaii a better place to live."

Lee says he has a vested interest in Hawaii's future.

"My wife is from San Francisco and our friends and family are in California, so we have deep connections to the mainland," says the father of two. "But Hawaii is where our family is now. This is our home."