



# MAOLA ALIA



## Maola Alia, climbing the ladder to put up the decorations

From a young age, events and decorations were intriguing to Phillip Luitolo. *“Event planning and doing decorations is my passion. When I left school, it was a love that I discovered in church and I built up on that. It has kept me going right up until now,”* he said.

His involvement in church functions actively nurtured his growing talent and in 2000, he and a friend established Maola Alia as an informal event planning business. Phillip explained that, *“Maola Alia is a name*



*from my mother tongue, which translated to English means ‘to be surprised.’”*

Initially, Phillip found work primarily through word-of-mouth, carrying out event and wedding planning and decorations for his wider church family. *“We have a ministry in church that looks after events and fundraisings. I was part of the team that organised those things.”* It wasn't until 14 years later that Phillip decided to officially register their operations in Honiara, sharing *“that’s where the dream came true.”*

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While Maola Alia remains popular amongst Phillip's local community, they now cater for noted corporate clients such as the Australian High Commission and the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry. *"My customers are my family and church congregation. We also have government and some non-government organisations,"* said Phillip.

He added that providing a unique and tailored service for every client has been key to Maola Alia's success. *"We listen to them, their ideas, what they want, and we execute them, rather than doing what we want,"* he emphasised.



*"My customers are my family..."*



Now, Maola Alia has 9 employees and their services include producing crafts, wreaths, earrings, head pieces and other ladies' accessories using local materials. Phillip has continued to expand the business offering by further drawing on his own skill set. *"I'm a graduate chef, so I bake and do pastries. It's also something that we have incorporated into the business,"* he said. Phillip also provides event planning advice to his clients. Maola Alia's most high-profile event was decorating the venue for a luncheon with the Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister at the Mendana Hotel.

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*"We put a center piece right at the table where he was sitting," Phillip said proudly.*

Phillip also shares his expertise and encourages young people to get involved in the local events that Maola Alia helps bring to life. *"I help youths in the area by providing them with avenues to be involved in the events that we do, especially since this business started when we were in church. In this way, young Solomon Islanders can find and develop their skills and talents in the area of decorating and creating crafts."* *"After clients pay us for their event, I also help in giving them pocket money*



*for their school. Most of them are my brothers and sisters from church and my other siblings,"* he explained. Paying homage to where it all began, Phillip and his team *"always involve ourselves in some events where we go and help out in the church with family activities and community fundraisings. Sometimes we went to set up the venue. Sometimes we cook for the event."*

Maola Alia began using Facebook in 2014 to further increase their popularity, where they share posts of

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their decorating work, including stunning floral arrangements, table settings, bouquets, wreaths and balloons. It also provides an additional platform for the business to engage with clients, and where *“customers contact us; they send us photos of work we have done already,”* said Phillip. He added that, *“Facebook has helped us a lot in making our business to be known in the country and beyond. It is more like a platform where we can reach out to clients. We don’t have the financial capability to go out there in the wider community to do advertisements, and Facebook has been there to help us grow.”*

*“I look at Facebook as the only main advertising platform that helps the business a lot. Without it, I won’t have the business running. It is very important for small businesses that are not out there. It’s more of an avenue where small businesses like us are trying to market ourselves. Facebook is more like a life saver for me,”* Phillip concluded.

Maola Alia is a fine example of how something small can flourish into something great, and for sure Phillip and his team are now reaping the results of their diligence and efforts.





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