



**ISLAND MATTERS** *Mufi Hannemann*

# Ho'okupu Center Will Be A Hub For Youth

It's always gratifying to recognize a group that's doing wonderful things for our island community. They often toil in anonymity, the public unaware of their invaluable contributions to the greater good.

One such organization is Kupu, a nonprofit founded in 2007 to provide hands-on training programs that educate and mentor youth to become stewards of our culture and environment. I wrote about Kupu (which means "to sprout or grow") in *MidWeek* a few years back and since then, they have trained more than 3,500 young people in conservation, sustainability and environmental education. Its work-while-learning approach has led to hundreds of internships and service-learning opportunities to support over 150 partner sites across Hawai'i and the Pacific.

Kupu's CEO is John Leong, a distinguished Pacific Century Fellows alumnus, who has done a phenomenal job in developing the organization. Most recently, he has been hard at work spearheading the launch of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Ho'okupu Center at Kewalo Basin, slated to open mid-March.

The center will be a hub for Kupu's conservation, sustainability and farm-to-table culinary youth programs. It will be a hub for youth who have been able to earn their alternative high school diplomas, pursue higher education, and secure volunteer and paid jobs through Kupu's cultural and environmental service-learning program.

Young adults who work in the culinary program will



Kupu CEO John Leong explains the transformation taking place at Kewalo Basin with the new Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Ho'okupu Center.

PHOTO COURTESY DEBBIE KIM MORIKAWA

operate a food truck and manage the kitchen to produce food and value-added products while turning their lives around.

The center will provide a space for Kaka'ako's growing neighborhood and the general public to come together to enjoy events, workshops, exhibits and other opportunities.

Says John, "We envision the center to provide meaningful activities, educational programming, and much more for the larger public to enjoy."

With the help of architectural firm G70, Kupu strengthened the environmental and cultural integrity of the building by meeting LEED criteria. This includes adopting reused materials, natural airflow in common areas, natural lighting and renewable energy. The center will use compostable materials and provide workshops on sustainability.

Kupu's presence on the waterfront has had the added benefit of reducing litter, homelessness and crime in the area.

Always quick to credit others, John notes, "Through the support of government and

community leaders, private sector companies, other nonprofits and individuals, Kupu was able to renovate and secure the center. It's a prime example of a private-public partnership that benefits the community, state and next generation of Hawai'i's youth."

## Sheraton Kaua'i Resort GM Leads The Way

News of similar good work comes from the Garden Island. At Sheraton Kaua'i Resort's RumFire restaurant, there's a private oceanview booth numbered Table 53. It's a unique project conceived by general manager Chip Bahouth, and was originally introduced when he was at a hotel on Maui.

Here's how it works: Each month, the hotel features a nonprofit from a list, which now is 30 organizations deep. Sheraton then donates net proceeds from all food and beverage sales at Table 53 to that month's beneficiary.

Past recipients have included Kaua'i Economic Opportunity, Kaua'i YWCA, Kaua'i Film Academy, Kaua'i Hospice, Supporting the Language of Kaua'i, Kaua'i Sailing, Kaua'i

High School and more, all of them local groups with established community ties. The featured organizations encourage supporters to make reservations for Table 53, while the Sheraton team promotes the program and encourages guests to book the table.

Chip tells us it's been operating for seven years, and in that time has raised an impressive \$250,000 and helped 86 nonprofits.

It's been so popular that Sheraton Kaua'i Resort has introduced Bungalow 53, a private poolside bungalow for six, as well as Cabana 53, a beach-side, two-seat shaded lounge chair — both available

by reservation. Each month, the combined proceeds from all three will be donated to the featured nonprofit. For February and March, none other than our very own Visitor Industry Charity Walk will benefit.

Chip has enjoyed a long history in the hospitality business. He grew up in the industry, moving with father Nick, who was a longtime Starwood general manager and served as general manager for Sheraton Kaua'i, too.

Chip has been with Starwood Hotels & Resorts, now Marriott International, for 37 years and counting. A graduate of Saint Louis School,

Chip has worked at Sheraton Waikiki, Princess Ka'iulani and Sheraton Maui, among other Starwood properties.

"I challenge everyone to do something like this. It's not that difficult to do, and truly makes an impact in the local community," he says.

Patrons interested in supporting this charitable program should make reservations; the table, bungalow and cabana are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Kudos to Chip and the staff at Sheraton Kaua'i Resort for their terrific work and outstanding example.

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