

Protecting Kahaluu Bay | Hawaii 24/7

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December 6, 2011

Posted on 11:25 pm, Sunday, December 4, 2011.

The mobile Kahaluu Bay Education Center will be at the beach park each day. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)



Karin Stanton | Hawaii 24/7 Editor

The Kohala Center has entered into a 10-year contract with the county to



establish a learning center at Kahaluu Beach Park.

The Kahaluu Bay

Education Center offers a learning experience for visitors and residents — one that teaches respect and reverence for the natural and cultural resources of Kahaluu Bay.

“It’s a great day today, to be able to move forward with this project,” said county Parks and Recreation Director Bob Fitzgerald at Saturday’s blessing of the education center.

“The main thing is teaching people to be respectful of our ocean,” Fitzgerald said. “The Kohala Center will be a great partner in helping us protect our resources and helping us develop our cultural and education programs.”

The education center represents a new model of collaboration between the county and a nonprofit, The Kohala Center. The two entities will work together to enhance the natural environment of Kahaluu Bay through educational, public outreach, and research efforts.

“We are excited about this partnership with The Kohala Center and we hope it can be used as a template for similar agreements around our island,” Mayor Billy Keno said. “Kahaluu Bay Education Center will provide the necessary link to remind us of what we already know — that our recreational and natural resources can be enjoyed by our residents and visitors — but these wahi pana, or celebrated places, are fragile and it is everyone’s responsibility to help preserve them.”

At Saturday’s blessing, Cindi Punahaole, public outreach and volunteer coordinator for The Kohala Center, said the day marked the renewed effort to preserve the bay and educate a new generation about the ocean.

“It’s a blessing really,” she said. “Kahaluu was very sick. You could just feel it in the water. Now you can feel the healing.”

Part of the vision is to empower local children and teach them how to help protect their island and its resources.

“It’s about being aloha ambassadors,” Punihaole said. “It’s not about telling people what to do; it’s about giving people the information to make the right choices without pounding their heads.”



An 8-minute educational video is shown to those who rent snorkel gear. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)

Kahaluu Beach Park can and should be host to a visitor center similar to the one at Hanauma Bay, which provides educational experiences and employment opportunities for local people, Punihaole said.

“Current visitor numbers support the creation of an education center at Kahaluu,” she said. “Local residents, adjoining landowners, and business owners support this project, and the Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce took action to adopt it.”

The Bay Education Center is starting small. A new, portable facility to house the educational center and the snorkel rental concession was designed by Jennifer Bryan of Anoano Design Group and will be parked on-site daily.

The center provides educational videos and computerized access to environmental and cultural information about Kahaluu Bay and the Keauhou area.

As part of the educational outreach efforts, The Kohala Center will manage a snorkel rental concession through which visitors can learn how to enjoy the bay and at the same time protect its fragile environment.

Profits will be re-invested in educational programs and in the implementation of the Kahaluu Beach Park Master Plan, which incorporates the community’s vision for revitalization of this area.

New staff will be hired and trained to operate the rental concession and the educational center and to support volunteers. Staff and volunteers will wear distinctive apparel to be readily identified by bay visitors.

The rental center and the educational center is open from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. every day that the park is open.

The Kohala Center will continue its successful ReefTeach and Citizen Science programs, as well as the other outreach, educational, volunteer, and research programs currently underway at Kahaluu

Bay.

Currently, ReefTeach includes more than 270 volunteers and three dozen businesses. They gave 'reef etiquette' talks and tips to more than 36,000 park users last year.

The Kohala Center also created the ReefTeach "Train-the-Trainer" and "Adopt-a-Day at Kahaluu Bay" programs in which more than 30 businesses participate.

Both programs educate staff members of businesses and organizations on proper reef on protecting ocean resources so they may share that knowledge with visitors who frequent their establishments.

The Kohala Center is an independent, not-for-profit center for research and education about and for the environment. The Kohala Center builds teaching and research programs for energy and food self-reliance as well as ecosystem health.

— Find out more:

www.kohalacenter.org

www.kohalacenter.org/kahaluubay/about.html



Kahaluu Beach Park. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)

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2. ['Bay Concert' celebrates Kahaluu Bay, Kane](#)
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