

North Hawaii News

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Matt Hamabata wins Small Business Award

Kohala Center Director Matt Hamabata has been named this year's winner of the 2012 Small Biz Success Award in the nonprofit category by Hawaii Business Magazine. The award was given to six winners and 12 finalists who were judged in 12 categories, including small business and nonprofit.

Hamabata created the grass-root, nonprofit business Kohala Center in 2001. The Waimea nonprofit has developed from a simple business with a big idea, to a statewide recognized organization that has begun to make waves in the Hawaii community. The Kohala Center developed from a Hawaii Island community health project in 1999 and 2000. Hamabata noticed growing community concern of health-related issues, such as diabetes, alcoholism, obesity, drug abuse and domestic violence.



Some of the projects he has created focus on the reproduction of native Hawaiian plants, supporting local farmers and fishermen, and planting school gardens. His school gardening program has been adopted statewide by 59 schools, producing approximately 15,000 pounds of food during the 2010-2011 school year, allowing the schools to serve Hawaii grown food.

His projects have also extended to environmental issues such as caring for the reef at Kahaluu Beach Park in Kona. This small project has since grown into a 10-year contract with Hawaii county to improve environmental awareness, and increase research through the establishment of the Kahaluu Bay Education Center. The Kohala Center has helped to foster Hawaii farmers, ranchers and fishermen using a co-op method to lower their overall costs for production and marketing.

Representative Cindy Evans said, "Mr. Hamabata has shown excellent foresight and innovation by choosing to attack his community's health problems from the root, rather than attempting to fix its result."

Hamabata is the executive director of the Kohala Center, along with Roberta Chu, the president of the Kohala Center's board.

Photo: Kohala Center Director Matt Hamabata was named winner of the 2012 Small Biz Success Award in the nonprofit category by Hawaii Business Magazine