For Immediate Release

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Kahaluʻu Bay Education Center blesses a new home

Larger vehicle will serve more visitors

KAMUELA, Hawaiʻi—June 23, 2015—Something big, bold, and beautiful has come ashore and established a commanding presence at Kahaluʻu Beach Park.

It’s the new home-on-wheels home for The Kohala Center’s Kahaluʻu Bay Education Center (KBEC), thanks to the support and fundraising efforts of hundreds of donors, businesses, volunteers, and community partners.

Blessed by Danny and Anna Akaka and officially placed into service on Monday, the larger 25-foot mobile education unit replaces the original colorful van that has served since 2011 as an education center and snorkel rental concession for more than 12,000 patrons a year. Daily use plus the weather and salty air had taken its toll on the original van, causing the little seven-day-a-week workhorse to literally burst at the seams from rust.

KBEC’s new home provides more than 1,000 cubic feet of additional space for everything from snorkel gear and merchandise to educational materials and a flat-panel monitor for screenings of the center’s bay orientation video. The additional capacity will enable the center to serve and educate even more visitors on how to enjoy Kahaluʻu Bay without harming its fragile corals.

“The bigger vehicle allows us to create lifetime memories for even more visitors and continue our work to revive and revitalize the bay and beach park for generations to come,” said Cindi Punihaole, KBEC program director. “KBEC now has a bigger and more modern new home, and we are so grateful to our longtime supporters, new friends, and visitors who contributed to this effort and made our beautiful new center a reality.” The smaller van will continue to serve The Kohala Center as a produce transport and delivery vehicle for The Center’s Demonstration Farm in Honokaʻa.

KBEC began its $60,000 fundraising efforts for the new vehicle in January 2014, and supporters quickly pledged $40,000 in matching funds. Within six months an additional $20,000 in pledges made the upgrade a reality.

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“No contribution was too small. We even had a tip jar at the center for visitors to contribute their loose change and that ended up making a big difference. Truly every little bit helped,” said Punihaoele, who led the fundraising effort.

Punihaoele worked with the California office of FoodCart USA to procure the new vehicle, which had once served as a food truck in South Dakota. FoodCart USA brought the vehicle to Southern California to be inspected, repaired, painted, and the interior gutted and new walls installed. They also coordinated the installation of a colorful and educational vehicle wrap designed by Honoka’a-based artist Jessica Young before the vehicle was shipped to Kawaihae courtesy of Matson Navigation. Upon its arrival in Hawai’i, KBEC staff took to installing interior storage amenities, a flat-panel monitor for screenings of the center’s bay orientation video, and other finishing touches before the new center made its big debut.

Kahalu’u Bay’s spectacular and easily accessible snorkeling attracts more than 400,000 visitors each year, making the bay the most popular tourist destination on the west coast of Hawai’i Island. KBEC staff and volunteers greet, educate, rent snorkel gear, and sell merchandise to 12,000 visitors a year at the center, and educate an additional 40,000 patrons annually on the beach and in the water about stewardship and “reef etiquette” through its ReefTeach volunteer program.

Like all of The Kohala Center’s programs, KBEC evolved from the expressed needs and aspirations of local communities. In KBEC’s case, residents of Kahalu’u grew concerned that the increasing number of visitors to the bay was adversely impacting the health of coral reefs and marine life due to beachgoers literally yet unknowingly trampling the corals to death. The University of Hawai’i Sea Grant Program helped the community establish the ReefTeach volunteer program in 2000 to educate bay visitors not to step or stand on corals, and in 2006 The Kohala Center was asked to assume management of the program. Five years later, The Kohala Center and the County of Hawai’i entered into a ten-year agreement to establish KBEC with the goal of creating an education center to protect the bay’s fragile ecosystem and ensure that the bay and park remain a clean, safe, and welcoming place for both visitors and residents.

Moving forward, KBEC plans to embark on a fundraising campaign to develop a long-term plan that will improve Kahalu’u Beach Park’s public facilities and establish a permanent education center.

“Keeping the bay healthy is critical not only to the communities surrounding Kahalu’u, but the region’s economy as well,” Punihaoele said. “Kahalu’u Bay a vital environmental, cultural, and economic asset to our island. But our work doesn’t have just a local impact: we think of our visitors, who come to Kahalu’u Bay from all over the world, as ambassadors who can carry our
message home with them and make positive impacts on their local marine and aquatic environments. A quick interaction that promotes a behavior change as small and simple as not standing or stepping on coral can truly have a ripple effect across the planet.”

KBE is open from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day that the park is open, and the colorful new mobile unit is certainly easy to find.

**About the Kahalu'u Bay Education Center**
Kahalu'u Bay Education Center (kahaluubay.org) is a partnership between The Kohala Center and the County of Hawai‘i. The program promotes environmental stewardship to ensure the bay remains a healthy and welcoming place for residents and visitors alike.

**About The Kohala Center**
Founded in the year 2000, The Kohala Center (kohalacenter.org) is an independent, community-based center for research, conservation, and education. We turn research and ancestral knowledge into action, so that communities in Hawai‘i and around the world can thrive—ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially.

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