

For Immediate Release

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Island youth expand their futures through university programs *Scholarships for Hawai‘i Island high school students open doors to opportunities*

KAMUELA, Hawai‘i—June 19, 2014—Hawai‘i Island youth are accelerating academically and transforming their futures by participating in summer university programs made accessible with scholarships from The Kohala Center.

The programs, held at institutions such as Cornell University and Brown University, expose Hawai‘i Island students to leadership and academic development opportunities that catalyze greater achievement and new career aspirations. Lysha Matsunobu, a 2014 graduate of Parker School in Waimea and a U.S. Presidential Scholar, exemplifies the pivotal power of a summer program. Through a Kohala Center scholarship, she participated in the Academic Connections program at University of California, San Diego, in 2011.

“My summer at UC San Diego is invaluable to me as I remember it as my starting point in exploring academics beyond my high school,” said Matsunobu. “I returned to self-study AP Environmental Science in my sophomore year confident with the knowledge I had gained from the course at UCSD.”

Matsunobu is one of 141 U.S. Presidential Scholars selected nationally based on their outstanding academic achievement, artistic excellence, leadership, citizenship, and contribution to school and community. She begins her undergraduate study at Stanford University this fall.

“By offering scholarships to Hawai‘i Island high school students to participate in these leadership programs at some of the world’s finest universities, we are inspiring island youth to reach for the stars and push for excellence in their academic and future professional careers,” said Dr. Matthews Hamabata, President and CEO of The Kohala Center. “These opportunities help our youth expand their worldviews and envision future opportunities they might not otherwise be encouraged to pursue.” Himself born and raised in rural Hanapepe, Kaua‘i, Hamabata went on to earn his undergraduate degree at Cornell, his doctorate at Harvard, and first taught at Yale University.

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This summer, two more students will receive scholarships from The Kohala Center to participate in programs at East Coast universities: KaMele Sanchez, a rising senior at Honoka‘a High & Intermediate School, and Kaila Alcoran-Gaston, a recent graduate of Ke Ana La‘ahana Public Charter School.

“This program gives me the opportunity to expand my knowledge and enhance my skills, so that I can come back home and share and help better my community,” said Sanchez, who will attend Cornell University’s CURIE Academy Program in Ithaca, New York. The CURIE Academy is a one-week residential engineering program for high school girls who excel in math and science.

Alcoran-Gaston will attend the Brown Environmental Leadership Lab (BELL) program in Bristol, Rhode Island, which focuses on sustainable development through several academic disciplines, including biology, engineering, environmental science, and policy.

“I’m excited to learn about human demands on the environment and what can and cannot be compromised in terms of long-term detrimental effects on our ocean and coastline ecosystem. There are critical decisions to make at the community, county and state levels,” said Alcoran-Gaston. “I hope to learn how to contribute more knowledgeably to my own coastal community.”

To learn more about The Kohala Center’s academic and scholarship programs, go to <http://kohalacenter.org/programs/academic>.

About The Kohala Center

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