

NEWS RELEASE

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MAUI OCEAN CENTER EMBRACES HAWAII'S RICH NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Malama ka 'āina a me ke kai
Caring for the land and sea

MA'ALAEA, MAUI, HI – The living ocean ... vibrant, teeming and uncontained. For generations, it has sustained the bodies and spirits of the Hawaiian people. At the Maui Ocean Center, Hawaii's legacy is perpetuated through a genuine commitment to share and preserve the rich natural and cultural treasures of our island home.

Today, this three-acre marine park has successfully integrated Hawaii's host culture in a variety of programs including naturalist presentations, exhibits, Hawaiian cultural advisors, special events, and community involvement. These dedicated efforts have earned the Maui Ocean Center the name "The Hawaiian Aquarium" as well as a host of accolades, including Hawaii Visitors & Convention Bureau's prestigious "Keep It Hawaii" honor for businesses that perpetuate the Hawaiian culture in the tourism industry.

Preserving the 'Aumakua: Maui Ocean Center's Hawaiian Cultural Advisors

In Old Hawaii, *mano* (the shark) was considered *na 'aumakua* (family or personal gods). Often a departed ancestor took the form of a shark after death and appeared in dreams to living relatives. Hawaiians who had a shark as their *'aumakua* did not eat sharks and provided food to a special shark whom they believed to be a relative. Today, Maui Ocean Center pays reverence and respect for Hawaii's cultural past by having *Kabu* (guardian and caretaker) Dane Maxwell bless each shark that enters or leaves the Aquarium.

The Aquarium's former cultural advisor, Charles Kauluwehi Maxwell, along with Sam Ka'ai and other respected Hawaiian practitioners have shared their *mana'o* (knowledge) for Maui Ocean Center's various educational and conservation programs. In addition to paying homage to Hawaii's *'aumakua*, these guardians also contribute to the marine park's standard of operations and service, preside over blessings of important functions and facilities, as well as empower and train employees through their love and respect for the island's host culture.

The heart and soul of the Maui Ocean Center is the exhibit called "Hawaiians and the Sea". Truly a gift of love, various cultural advisors and members of the community have contributed to this exhibit so that visitors may better understand the intimate relationship between the Hawaiian people and the sea.

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The ancient Hawaiians were one of the earliest ecologists. They were expert navigators, using the stars as guides and traveling in their handmade, hydrodynamically perfected vessels. These proficient fishermen were also masters of aquaculture as a result of their unique system for stocking and harvesting fish in ponds. The story of the ways of the Hawaiians – their *kapu* (sacred, forbidden) system, their *ahupua'a* system of living harmoniously with the environment from mountain to sea, their skillful building of canoes and fishing utensils and, above all, their spiritual connection with the ocean and its inhabitants – is told in this important exhibit.

Keeping the Spirit Through Hawaiian-Inspired Exhibits and Tours

Ocean Naturalists interpreting Hawaii's underwater world are trained to use Hawaiian names for the animals, as well as popular terms, in their presentations. Rather than calling the octopus "tako", they say *he'e* (heh-eh). They have also been trained in the traditional usages of much of Hawaii's marine life. In addition, Maui Ocean Center staff has participated in Hawaiian cultural and language training led by *Kabu* (guardian, caretaker) Lyons Kapi'ioho Naone. The collective result is a unique learning experience and a delightful immersion into Hawaii's rich cultural history.

In Honor of Ku'ula, The God of Fishing

Even before the marine park officially opened its doors on March 13, 1998, the Hawaiian Aquarium paid respect to Hawaii's cultural legacy by building a *ko'a* (fishermen's shrine) on property. Located on the left side of the Seascape Ma'alaea Restaurant, this structure was erected days before the facility's opening and was dedicated to the *'aumakua mano* (shark guardian) of the Aquarium's first cultural advisor Charles Maxwell's family's ancestral gods who come into the bay of Ma'alaea.

The *ko'a* is the smallest structure of worship and is dedicated solely to the service of Ku'ula, the god of fishing. Ku'ula, a real person who lived in the 11th century, was a master fisherman and when he died, the people deified him and made him into a god. Ku'ula still can be found on Maui today and appears in various shapes: rectangular platforms and terraces, small enclosures, circular or horseshoe shapes and irregular heaps of stones.

The *pohaku* (stones) to build this fisherman's shrine were gathered from Charles Maxwell's family ancestral home in Ukumehame, about seven miles (Lahaina side) from Ma'alaea. When these stones were brought to the marine park, it rained continuously until the structure was built. As soon as the last stone was placed on the *ko'a* and the chanting started, the rain stopped. Hawaiians called it *hoailona* (a sign of good luck). The next day, a tiger shark came to the Maui Ocean Center.

The mission of Maui Ocean Center is to foster understanding, wonder and respect for Hawaii's marine life. Maui Ocean Center was named "Top 25 Best Aquariums in the U.S." and inducted into "Certificate of Excellence Hall of Fame 2015" by TripAdvisor, "Top-Rated Attraction in Hawaii" by Zagat Survey US Family Travel Guide, "Leader In Responsible Tourism" on the Top 100 Blue List by Islands Magazine, and "Best Land Activity" in 2008, 2009, 2011 by the readers of The Maui News. Open daily from 9 to 5, and from 9 to 6 in July and August. For more information please contact the Maui Ocean Center: 192 Ma'alaea Road; Ma'alaea, HI 96793; telephone (808) 270-7000, facsimile (808) 270-7070, e-mail: info@mauiocenter.com or visit www.mauiocenter.com.