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## **NOAA's Mokupāpapa Discovery Center Reopens in Hilo**

Tomorrow, NOAA's Mokupāpapa Discovery Center, an educational facility designed to showcase the marine environment, and the culture and history of the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, will reopen its doors in Hilo's historic Koehnen's Ltd. building after nearly a year of refurbishing. The 20,000 square-foot facility features new exhibits, artwork and a 3,500-gallon aquarium.

Five times larger than its previous space, the new facility includes interactive displays and kiosks, a large-scale wall map, and wall-sized graphic panels with interpretive text in both Hawaiian and English. The center also boasts a saltwater aquarium to showcase some of the fish that inhabit Northwestern Hawaiian Island reefs.

"Facilities like the Mokupāpapa Discovery Center are absolutely critical in providing the spark that motivates young people to pursue careers in science or resource management," said Dr. Kathryn D. Sullivan, acting NOAA administrator, during her recent visit to the center. "The key is to show and not just tell. Since most people will never have the opportunity to visit the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, the center serves to bring the place to the people and spur greater public awareness of the region and ocean conservation issues."

Since opening in 2003, Mokupāpapa has hosted more than 60,000 visitors per year – including school groups, community groups, locals and tourists alike. To date, more than half a million people have walked through the center's doors.

NOAA envisions that the new facility will also become a premier downtown Hilo attraction and popular gathering place for the local community, hosting meetings, cultural events and other activities. Future plans call for the addition of more classrooms, a theater and a training center that will be used to host workshops for domestic and international groups working in marine management and conservation.

The Koehnen-Rohner families own the building and have invested substantially in necessary facility upgrades as well as providing NOAA an affordable rental rate. A representative for the families said previously the family wanted to give back to the community and believes in the potential of a new and expanded discovery center.

"All of this would not be possible without the support of the Koehnen-Rohner families," said Kālewa Correa, Mokupāpapa Discovery Center manager. "They've been very generous in their support of our efforts."

For more information, visit [www.papahanaumokuakea.gov/education/center.html](http://www.papahanaumokuakea.gov/education/center.html).

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