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### **NOAA partners with local family to expand Hilo Discovery Center**

NOAA today announced a partnership with a longtime Hilo family to relocate the Mokupāpapa Discovery Center to the former Koehnen's furniture store location in downtown Hilo. The move to the furniture store building is the first step in expanding the facility which provides educational programming about the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and surrounding marine environment.

"With five times more space, we envision creating an education complex that will feature an expanded Mokupāpapa Discovery Center, classroom space, a theater and a training center to host workshops with partners from near and far," said Andy Collins, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument education coordinator, who led the creation of the original center. "Mokupāpapa has exceeded every expectation we have had for it over the past 10 years. With the expansion of facilities and programs, we foresee even greater numbers of visitors and opportunities for new partnerships and outreach," he predicted.

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. Mokupāpapa has served as a physical hub of learning for both children and adults, hosting well-attended monthly educational talks, summer programs and outreach activities, while drawing a constant stream of school and community groups from around the state and beyond.

Fred Koehnen, company president and a second generation Hilo resident, said his family wanted to give back to the community and believes in the potential of a new and expanded discovery center.

"Conservation and education are important to the future, and that is why we are working with NOAA to make this happen," Koehnen said. "Mokupāpapa has been a positive influence in downtown Hilo and we are excited about future possibilities."

Mokupāpapa: Discovery Center for Hawai'i's Remote Coral Reefs opened in May 2003 as a cornerstone educational initiative of NOAA's Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, now part of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

Since most people will never have the opportunity to visit these remote islands, the modest 4,000-square-foot Mokupāpapa Discovery Center was conceived to "bring the place to the people" and spur greater public awareness of the region and ocean conservation issues more generally.

Last month, staff and volunteers began packing up displays moving them three blocks down Hilo's Bayfront as the first step in expanding the facility. NOAA plans to re-open the exhibits on the first floor of the Koehnen Building this summer, which coincides with the 10th year anniversary of Mokupāpapa.

Kālewa Correa, Mokupāpapa Discovery Center manager, is excited about the potential for the new space. "This move and future expansion could never be possible without the generous support of the Koehnen-Rohner families, who share our vision of education for the community," he said. "They learned of our need to expand in the face of a shrinking federal budget and have graciously worked with us to lease their historic building on the waterfront at a rate we could afford. We are grateful to Koehnen's for partnering with us to bring world-class education, discovery and training facilities to the island of Hawai'i."

In addition to student visitations during the academic year, Mokupāpapa offers a week-long summer course to 7,000 students each summer. Staff from the center regularly participate in community events and provide hands-on outreach educational activities for students. These efforts have made a positive impression on the community.

For more information about the relocation, contact Andy Collins at 808-694-3922. For information about Mokupāpapa Discovery Center, visit [www.papahanaumokuakea.gov/education/center.html](http://www.papahanaumokuakea.gov/education/center.html).

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