

Big Island Weekly

Designing minds

By Kristine Kubat

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You hear it in boardrooms and government chambers, classrooms and coffee shops, the word 'sustainability' is in standard usage when discussing the future and it seems this island has attracted an exceptionally high number of people who not only believe in the concept but feel compelled to make it a reality.

Angling for a prime location in that preferred future is the Institute for Pacific Design. The newly minted not-for-profit venture represents a collaboration between charitable and business interests devoted to doing good while doing well.



When asked for photographs that might depict what the Institute for Pacific Design is all about, The Kohala Center's executive director Matt Hamabata said, "Use something that shows renewable energy in use. This fits perfectly with our mission." Above a home solar system installed by Hilo's ProVision Technologies. The company has been busier than ever with the recent increase in oil prices and electric rates. As Hamabata put it, "The PV business is going through the roof right now." To learn more about ProVision, contact Douglas Bath or Marco Manglesdorf at 969-3281. - Courtesy ProVision Technologies

"Combining the best of Hawaiian and Western knowledge to provide affordable consulting, policy and investment research, green enterprise-creation and technical education

programs." This is the blurb released with the recent announcement that described the institute's mission. If all goes as planned, look to IPD to take the lead in developing and implementing the sustainable island lifestyle everyone is on about.

Seed money for the institute comes from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs' Community Based Economic Development Program -- \$30,000 has been awarded for the first step, creation of the IPD business plan.

The Kohala Center is a not-for-profit, independent academic institute in Waimea that works to develop research and educational programs about and for the environment. The organization will shepherd the institute through its development process and the center's executive director, Matt Hamabata, is positively ebullient when talking about it.

After what he calls "way too long" on the mainland (30 years), this native of Hanapepe, Kaua`i now resides on Hawai`i Island (six years). Hamabata says he is "delighted to be back" and clearly he is inspired by what he calls the "powerful creative energy" here. "I find a really vital, dynamic in Hawai`i and this island in particular."

His mission with the center generally and the institute specifically is to help engineer a society that prospers by enhancing rather than degrading the natural beauty and vitality of Hawai`i. His partner in the IPD project is Lani Yamasaki -- founder of `Ano `ano Aloha, a not-for-profit organization that promotes Native Hawaiian culture for similar reasons.

"We have so much respect for The Kohala Center," says Yamasaki as she provides a wealth of information in a dazzling few minutes on the phone. Although she is constrained for time during a busy schedule of community meetings, her voice conveys that lovely, distinctly Hawaiian old-school charm that never comes across as rushed. Yamasaki is known throughout Hawai`i for her book *Seeds of Life: `Ano `ano Aloha*. She is seen by many as a critical link between local k-puna and an international

following of Hawaiian spiritualism.

'Ano 'ano Aloha's purpose, as defined in the same announcement, is to "merge the spiritual legacy, values and sustainable practices of the Hawaiian ancestors with environmental stewardship, the arts, humanities, and sciences to create vibrant initiatives and socio-economic opportunities for Hawai`i's communities." Hamabata sums up The Kohala Center's mission by citing their tagline -- "education, environment, empowerment."

With both groups working independently in the greater Waimea region, it wasn't long before these community leaders were drawn together. "It became really clear to us the audiences we were working with were looking for the same thing," explains Yamasaki. That being social and economic opportunities that would allow islanders to thrive without requiring them to compromise their values.

Talk to either one of them and you hear the same ethic extolled. Hamabata is convinced that the technologies and practices we need to create the much-coveted sustainable future already exist, with some of these practices coming from tradition and others coming on the heels of recent discoveries. Yamasaki likes to say, "Hawaiian culture is not a thing of the past." As the two work together on what Yamasaki calls "economic development with a spiritual foundation," they, and their associates, will be drawing on the wisdom of the past to make the right choices for the future.

It's inspiring, almost heady, stuff that only gets better when you put Hamabata to this task: 'Imagine that the wildest dreams you had when envisioning the Pacific Institute for Design have all come true. What does Hawai`i Island look like?'

"Oh, my, well . . . "

It takes a minute for Hamabata to get started, but when he takes off it's nothing short of glorious.

"Communities powered by renewable resources, communities that really are energy-efficient, communities based on deploying these emerging green technologies, communities with firm economic bases, communities driven by clean business, communities that are healthy and vibrant, communities where the built environment is informed by a sense of Native Hawaiian values and design . . . "

What is most telling about this exercise is that each time Matt Hamabata describes the future, he starts with the word 'community.'

No doubt Lani Yamasaki would agree.

For additional information about The Kohala Center and the Institute for Pacific Design, visit <http://www.kohalacenter.org>.