



For Immediate Release

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North Hawai'i art gallery donates more than \$40,000 to environmental restoration efforts *Driven by desire to "do something good for our home"*

KAWAIHAE, Hawai'i—February 9, 2017—For Waimea residents Gunner and Elli Mench, supporting reforestation efforts on Hawai'i Island is all about giving back.

As owners of Harbor Gallery in Kawaihae, which curates a Wood Show twice a year largely featuring pieces made with materials grown on Hawai'i Island, they wanted to support an organization dedicated to protecting and reestablishing native forests. Since 2009 the couple has donated more than \$40,000 of their Wood Show proceeds to The Kohala Center to support its Kohala Watershed Partnership (KWP) program.

"We looked for an organization to donate part of the Wood Show proceeds to because we wanted to do something good for our home," said Gunner Mench. "Elli and I had participated in some KWP volunteer days planting endemic species to help reduce runoff and breathe life back onto the mountain. I've long had an interest in getting Pelekane Bay restored and we figured that donating to the Partnership would enable it to multiply those dollars and secure even more funding to do their meaningful work."

The contributions help mitigate sediment runoff into Pelekane Bay through a comprehensive erosion control program on the leeward side of Kohala Mountain. The Kohala Center's four-man KWP field crew maintains sediment check dams, removes and controls invasive plant and animal species, and plants native trees and shrubs in restoration areas to help revive and rejuvenate the mountain's native forests.

"Individual and private donations like the ones we receive from Gunner and Elli Mench are critical in supplying us with not only funding for materials and supplies, but with essential capital that enables us to compete for grants that require us to bring matching funds to the table," said Cody Dwight, coordinator of The Kohala Center's Kohala Watershed Partnership program. "We are humbled and honored by their generosity, which makes it possible for us to restore and protect Kohala's watersheds, native forests, and leeward coastline. By investing in conservation efforts, they're investing in Hawai'i's future."

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Gunner's interest in environmental issues traces back to the summer of 1970, when he and several students and teachers at his high school in Vermont compiled what would become one of the first curriculum guides to water pollution and environmental studies. Since then he has been passionate about protecting the environment and conserving resources, having served on the Kawaihae Local Resource Council and participating in discussions with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding the cleanup and restoration of Pelekane Bay. One of the Corps' conditions for aiding in the bay's restoration is for sediment runoff to be eliminated from the watershed.

"We've seen the forest continue to grow and thrive and seen the resulting erosion control," Mench said. "As long as KWP can keep doing what they're doing I don't expect we'll have these runoff problems in 20 years."

The Menchs have donated ten percent of the proceeds of their semiannual Wood Shows to support the Partnership's efforts, and Gunner is quick to point out the allocations don't hurt the Gallery's bottom line. "I would love to teach more local business owners how to do this because it's not something that's been detrimental to our business whatsoever," Mench said. "We're giving back to replenish and create more native forest and heal our island's environment, which is where our interest lies."

"As I see it we're investing in long-term restoration to bring nature back into balance here in our little corner of the world," he said. "I may not be able to do it for the whole world, but darn it we can contribute to doing it right here on Kohala Mountain."

Harbor Gallery's 2017 Winter Wood Show is currently on exhibit through February 18. The Gallery is open daily from 11:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and is located in the Kawaihae Harbor Shopping Center at 61-3665 Akoni Pule Highway.

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 ancestral knowledge into action, so that communities in Hawai'i and around the world can thrive—ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially.

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PHOTOS

(download at http://www.kohalacenter.org/docs/resources/tkc/release_images/TheKohalaCenter_20170209.zip):

[Photo_HarborGallery_Menchs.png] Harbor Gallery owners Elli and Gunner Mench with their cat Seaweed and dog Zeus (Photo courtesy The Kohala Center)

[Photo_HarborGallery_WinterWoodShow.png] Harbor Gallery's semiannual Wood Shows feature unique pieces handcrafted with woods sourced from Hawai'i Island (Photo courtesy The Kohala Center)

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