

For Immediate Release

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The Kohala Center announces new president and chief executive officer

KAMUELA, Hawai‘i—June 9, 2017—The Kohala Center announced the appointment of Cheryl Ka‘uhane Lupenui as its new president and chief executive officer, effective July 3, 2017.

“Cheryl Ka‘uhane Lupenui brings strong leadership skills, depth and breadth of work experience, and impressive team-building experience to The Kohala Center,” said Roberta Chu, chairperson of The Center’s board of directors. “It became very clear during the selection process that The Center and its management team would continue to develop and flourish under her leadership. Her thoughtfulness, energy, and enthusiasm are inspiring and will propel our efforts to new heights.”

For the past five years Lupenui has been the founder and principal of The Leader Project, a business that sources from Hawaiian and Western models to develop leadership capacity throughout organizations. Spanning multiple sectors such as transportation, education, health, human services, and public safety, her practice is based on building place-based leadership where all group members share the responsibility of leading and following.

She holds a Masters of Business Administration with a concentration in marketing, management, and finance from Tulane University, and a Bachelor of Business Administration in international business from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Over the course of her 30-year career, Lupenui has developed a multidisciplinary skillset that includes business and program development, systems-level policy making, capital improvement project planning and management, fund raising, community engagement, and strategy and leadership development.

Her career started as a business development associate at one of Hawai‘i’s largest businesses, but her entrepreneurial spirit soon guided her to open a restaurant that promoted sustainable agriculture by serving healthy meals made with locally grown produce. Lupenui’s restaurant management experience led her to the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) of O‘ahu, where just four years later she became the organization’s chief executive officer—the youngest in its history and the first of Native Hawaiian descent. During her 10-year tenure as CEO she helped launch a re-branding effort, a \$12 million capital campaign to renovate Laniākea, the organization’s historic downtown facility, and an \$8 million campaign to expand transitional housing for women and fitness and meeting facilities for the community. Hawai‘i

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Business Magazine named her as one of “25 People Who Will Shape the Next 25 Years” in 2007.

At the same time she started The Leader Project, then-Governor Neil Abercrombie appointed Lupenui to the Hawai‘i Board of Education (BOE) for a four-year term. While there she helped develop a new BOE/Department of Education Strategic Plan and several policies that created the Office of Hawaiian Education, Office of Community Engagement, and Nā Hopena A‘o, or HĀ (breath), a set of system-wide learning outcomes for the Hawai‘i Department of Education grounded in Native Hawaiian culture.

“My work in recent years has focused on seeing place, culture, community, and leadership as a whole ecosystem,” Lupenui said. “The Kohala Center is rich with these same elements that can guide our islands in policy and practice. Following a path to Kohala continues my journey emerging from single practitioner to a community of practice. I see a team of bold leaders making a positive impact and transmitting their stories to guide and strengthen each generation that follows.”

About The Kohala Center

Founded in the year 2000, The Kohala Center (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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