

CULTURE

MO'OMEHEU

To strengthen identity, Native Hawaiians will preserve, practice and perpetuate their culture.

Aloha Lāna'i



Tending the pineapple fields at Palāwai in south central Lāna'i, 1926. - Photo used with permission of Castle & Cooke Inc.

By Naomi Sodetani

Far off the beaten track, the quiet, secluded island of Lāna'i remains a mystery to most tourists – and even to most Hawai'i residents.

During its heyday as the world's largest pineapple plantation, it was dubbed the "Pineapple Isle." Since the last pineapple harvest in 1992, Lāna'i has been rebranded as a luxury-resort destination.

Beyond these slim facts tethered to its changing economic fortunes, few know of Lāna'i's deeper identity grounded in nearly a millenium of Hawaiian residency. Or know that its name, literally translated as "day of conquest," derives from ancient lore rejoicing the day that the chief Kaululā'au vanquished the evil ghosts from the island, allowing people to live here in peace.

Steeped in an abundance of such stories, Lāna'i awaits rediscovery. "For many, many years Lāna'i has been out of sight, out of mind – the under-served community," said noted cultural historian Kepā Maly, Executive Director of the Lāna'i Culture and Heritage Center. But that equation must change, he said, for the sake of the island's cultural survival.

On March 25 the center will host the Aloha Lāna'i Benefit and Concert at Mamiya Theatre on O'ahu, seeking to create broader awareness

of Lāna'i's history and to generate greater support for the museum's efforts to preserve the unique natural, cultural and historical legacy of the island.

The "pā'ina with a purpose" brings a festive sharing of island-made arts and crafts, 'ono pūpū, stellar entertainment and a chance to score such silent auction offerings as a handcrafted koa/ebony 'ukulele or a sumptuous stay at the Four Seasons Lodge at Kō'ele or its sister resort, Mānele Bay – all for a good cause. Proceeds will support ongoing programs of the Lāna'i CHC, and help kick off its endowment drive necessary to help sustain operations into the future.

Located in the heart of Lāna'i City, the community-based nonprofit serves as a veritable repository of the island's collective memory. The little museum has a big mission: to preserve, interpret and celebrate Lāna'i's natural history, Hawaiian traditions, diverse heritage and cultures, and ranching and plantation-era histories.

As one visitor from afar noted in the guest log, the space is "small but very impressive," brimming with immense substance and depth belying its size. The museum's collections showcase artifacts of Hawaiian origin collected through archaeological investigations or found by plantation employees over the years while working the fields with plow and hoe.

Objects enriching other museums and pri-

vate collections were brought home to Lāna'i. Historical plantation-era documents and family memorabilia are still constantly being donated by local residents who express grateful relief: "Oh, we've been waiting so long for there to be someplace where we could bring these things, where they will be safe."

The museum was born of Lāna'i's tumultuous transition from pineapple plantation to five-star resort development expressly to safeguard the island's past.

In 1985, billionaire David Murdock bought Dole Foods' parent company, Castle & Cooke Inc., which owns 98 percent of the island. A cooperative agreement between the Lāna'i Archaeological Committee, Hui Mālama Pono o Lāna'i, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Lanaians for Sensible Growth, Department of Land and Natu-

ALOHA LĀNA'I BENEFIT AND CONCERT

WHEN: March 25, 4 p.m.

WHERE: Mamiya Theatre, Saint Louis School

COST: \$25 presale, \$30 at door

TICKETS AND INFORMATION: lanaichc.org



Albert Halape Morita, foreground, and Mikala Enfield, far background, share the island's history with guests at the Lānaʻi Culture and Heritage Center. — *Courtesy photos*

ral Resources, and Castle & Cooke in 1987 sought to address community concerns for the care of the treasured cultural and natural resources of Lānaʻi.

Efforts to establish a community heritage center stalled for years. Then in 2006 Maly,

raised on Lānaʻi, returned home to help. Maly has worked for the past 30 years throughout the state on research and cultural resource-management programs, and also brought extensive experience in developing community partnerships in resource stewardship. In

2007, the center obtained its nonprofit status and opened its doors to the public.

Today the museum exists as “the fruit of many people’s vision, many people working over the past two decades seeking to help a community retain its sense of self,” Maly said. “Change happens, but that doesn’t mean our cultural identity has to be erased.”

Hawaiians have lived on the island of Lānaʻi for nearly 1,000 years. Archaeological evidence indicates that more than 6,000 people once lived sustainably here, prior to western contact. Ancient Hawaiian villages, ceremonial features, dryland agricultural fields, fishponds and a wide range of cultural sites still grace the shoreline of Lānaʻi. In the uplands, places like Kōʻele and Kihamāniania were also locations of significant traditional settlements and agricultural endeavors of the island’s original inhabitants.

Their descendants embody that vibrant heritage. Some people misperceive “that there are no Hawaiians left on Lānaʻi today, when, in fact, 600 people of Hawaiian ancestry still live here out of a total population of 2,800 or so residents,” Maly affirmed. “A strong core

of Hawaiian families have been here from the beginning.”

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs has provided almost \$1 million to date to support development of the museum’s new facility and its programs. OHA grants helped to create educational and job-training opportunities for island youth, and to conduct oral-history documentation, field stewardship site-restoration work and cultural research, enabling the museum to care for resources within, and beyond, its walls.

The Lānaʻi CHC is completing a traditional cultural properties study of the ahupuaʻa of Kaʻā. This OHA-funded project included a workshop that brought Lānaʻi students together with Hawaiian kūpuna and cultural practitioners, archaeologists and historians in a process of rediscovering cultural sites in Kaʻā. “The whole island is a living history museum,” Maly said. “But it’s hands on, it’s not a replica, it’s not under glass, this is a living environment.”

The human experience and the moʻolelo

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LĀNA'I

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linked with the island's wahi pana, or legendary places, are as fragile as memories, however. Many Lāna'i residents have told Maly that they had passed by these storied landscapes all their lives, unaware of their significance. "The land changes, our elders pass away and new generations lose touch with their heritage and the hard work of their elders," Maly said.

Voices of Lāna'i, video excerpts from recorded histories with more than 40 island kūpuna gathered since 2006, will debut at the benefit. In these conversations, the elders reflect on their experiences living and working on Lāna'i, providing vivid, personal glimpses into earlier eras. A number of kūpuna interviewed have since passed.

To keep its work moving forward,

the museum must now enlarge its base of support. "Lāna'i has a very small pool, only 3,000 residents, so we need to figure out a way to keep our doors open," Maly said. "Is it urgent? Yes. Because if we don't do it, we're going to lose it all – and then we dishonor our kūpuna who gave us the lives we have."

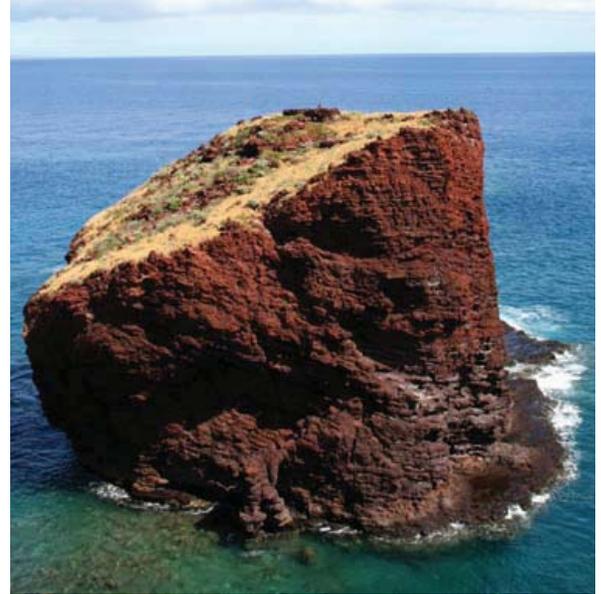
The museum's quest to fulfill its kuleana has inspired an outpouring of aloha from all those participating in the *Aloha Lāna'i* event. Emceed by Lāna'i's own Makani Tabura, KUMU-FM radio host, the concert will feature the musical artistry of Kūpapa and Ke 'Ala Aumoe, Nā Palapalai and Waipuna, and performances by Hālau Ka Pa Hula o Kauanoē o Wa'ahila, Hālau Hi'iakainamakalehua, Hālau o Nā Pua Kukui, Kumu Hula from Lāna'i and many others.

Kama'āina businesses that have stepped forward to help bring the event to O'ahu include: Atlas Insur-

ance Agency, Bank of Hawai'i, Farmers Hawai'i, First Insurance Co. of Hawai'i, Hawai'i Pacific Health, Hawaiian Telcom, Island Insurance Cos., Lāna'i Grand Adventures, Maui Electric Co., Young Brothers and Hawaiian Tug and Barge.

"We feel so blessed that all these people have come to us saying, 'We love what you're doing, we love Lāna'i and we're going to help you do this,'" Maly said. "So this will be a celebration for all those who have been touched by Lāna'i, whether they have visited once, picked pineapple or were raised here. And if you know nothing about Lāna'i, please come, have fun. Let us show you what is special about our island." ■

Naomi Sodetani is a freelance writer, documentary producer and former Publications Editor of Ka Wai Ola o OHA.



Lāna'i's Pu'upehe Islet, with platform identified as the tomb of Pehe, called "Sweetheart Rock." – Courtesy photo

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