

# Lanai's heritage thrives in core of new museum



**CHERYL CHEE TSUTSUMI**  
*Hawaii's Backyard*

At the grand opening of the Lanai Culture & Heritage Center (LCHC) on Jan. 16, Kepa Maly watched with pride and joy as residents of all ages, ethnicities and occupations planted 150 pineapple crowns in two 6-by-50-foot plots fronting the Old Dole Administration Building in Lanai City.

"From the 1950s through the 1970s, Lanai was the largest pineapple plantation in the world," said Maly, LCHC's executive director. "As soon as you come up the walkway to the museum, the plots engage you with the history of Lanai."

Although pineapple was the backbone of the island's economy for 70 years, it had not been planted on the island since Dole closed its nearly 16,000-acre plantation in 1992. An entire generation had never seen pineapple growing on Lanai.

"To me that's staggering because except for a small number of Hawaiian families with generational attachments to the land, pineapple is the reason people came here," Maly said. "At the museum's grand opening, multi-generational families shared the work of planting pineapple for the first time in 20 years. It was a wonderful thing to see."

So is the museum itself. It traces its beginnings back to 1987, when Castle & Cooke, which owns 97 percent of Lanai, agreed to establish a program to preserve the island's rich history and heritage. Residents supported the idea, but it didn't get off the ground until Maly became its executive director in 2007.

When he arrived, he found artifacts, old photos and historical documents lying in disarray in a small room in the administration building. He and his wife, Onaona, led a community effort to establish LCHC as a nonprofit organization; organize, research and catalog the donations; set up a photo



PHOTOS COURTESY KEPA MALY

At the center's grand opening in January, generations of families gathered to plant pineapple once again on Lanai in a plot right outside the Lanai Cultural & Heritage Center.



Artifacts on display in the Hawaiian heritage room tell the history of Lanai and its native residents.

IF YOU GO ...

## LANAI CULTURE & HERITAGE CENTER

- >> **Address:** Old Dole Administration Building, 730 Lanai Ave., Lanai City
- >> **Hours:** 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays. Closed Sundays, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day.
- >> **Admission:** Free
- >> **Phone:** 565-7177
- >> **E-mail:** info@lanaichc.org
- >> **Web site:** www.lanaichc.org
- >> **Notes:** Special arrangements for visitation can be made for groups of at least five people. Tax-deductible donations are accepted via a link on the Web site.

archive; create displays; and expand the collection.

"The community was excited and came forth with generous donations," Maly

said. "They brought adzes, poi pounders, ulu maika (bowling) stones and other artifacts that their parents and grandparents had found

when they were working in the fields. One auntie gave us a beautiful Korean silk gown that her sister wore in the 1930s. We also have tools, furniture, wooden calabashes, household implements, plantation equipment and bango, workers' metal identification tags — thousands of items representing Lanai's diverse cultures."

When Castle & Cooke was sold in 1985 and new management took over plantation operations, stacks of photos, field maps, journals, payroll records and other documents were discarded. Realizing those items chronicled an important chapter in Lanai's history, some families salvaged them from the dump, hoping one day there would be a home for them.

LCHC is that home. Its mission is "to inspire people to be informed, thoughtful and active stewards of Lanai's heritage by preserving, interpreting and celebrating its natural history, Hawaiian traditions, diverse cultures, and ranching and plantation era histories."

Occupying 1,200 square feet, LCHC focuses on the period from A.D. 1000, when the first Hawaiians settled on Lanai, to the end of the plantation era nearly 1,000 years later. Thanks to a \$750,000 grant from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs obtained

with the help of trustee Collette Machado, Lanai's treasures are protected in a climate-controlled environment with a dehumidifier, fire-retardant gypsum board, acid-free storage containers and UV-safe filters that shield fragile photos and documents from ultraviolet

**Kepa Maly:**  
*Lanai Cultural & Heritage Center executive director*



rays. Sliding walls, pocket doors and hanging and movable panels make clever use of limited space.

Among the exhibit highlights are videotaped oral histories of beloved Lanai kupuna (elders); a 4-foot-wide by 3-foot-8-inch-high painting of Lanai by former resident John Wullbrandt that shows 150 traditional place names and land boundaries; and a one-of-a-kind stone carving found at Kaenaiki, the largest heiau on the island, by members of the prominent Munro family. Maly believes the image is the aumakua (personal god) of a high-ranking chief.

On long-term loan from Bishop Museum are some 150 artifacts that esteemed anthropologist Kenneth Emory collected during his

fieldwork on Lanai in 1921 and 1922. Of particular note are the gunwales and bow of a single-man canoe made of aiea wood, a now-endangered dry-forest species. In ancient times, canoes were typically built from one tree, but since Lanai's forest resources are dwarfed because of its dry climate, trees of suitable size for canoes weren't readily available.

"What's amazing is this canoe was made of two pieces lashed together with sennit and olona and coconut cordage," Maly said. "To keep the water out, the pieces were caulked with breadfruit and kukui tree gum."

In 1778, when Capt. James Cook's ships were anchored off Niuhau, artist John Webber drew a canoe that scholars thought could not be accurate because it was made of pieces tied together like American Indian birch canoes.

"But here we have proof they existed in old Hawaii," Maly said. "Dr. Emory found this canoe part in 1921, and it was considered old then. It probably dates back to at least the late 1770s, the time of Western contact."

The work at LCHC is ongoing. It sponsors outreach programs for Lanai students, offers a walking tour of Lanai City and is developing a brochure for self-guided walks along the mile-long Kapihaa Village Interpretive Trail, which spotlights the remnants of homes, agricultural fields, ceremonial sites and more than 60 other archaeological features near Hulopoe Bay on the southern coast.

Maly hopes to enlarge the museum's space to accommodate classrooms, workshop areas and a library for the rare documents and books in its possession. He also has earmarked funds for a mentorship program for Lanai's youth.

"They must help carry the torch," Maly said. "If only a few of us care, when we move or die, the program dies. That must not happen. If Lanai does not assume stewardship of its precious cultural and historical assets, no one else will."

*Cheryl Chee Tsutsumi is a Honolulu-based freelance writer whose travel features for the Star-Bulletin have won multiple Society of American Travel Writers awards.*