

# Kihei Charter School to gain more space, decrease costs

By **CLAUDINE SAN NICOLAS**  
Staff Writer

KIHEI — A nightclub and restaurant space will be converted into the new campus for the Kihei Charter Middle School.

Opening is targeted for this July.

"We're gaining more space and we're decreasing our costs," Kihei Charter Executive Director Mark Christiano explained recently as he toured the space once used by Hapa's nightclub, a Mexican restaurant and the current Title Guaranty Escrow & Title Services offices on Lipoa Street.

Currently, middle school students at the only public charter school on Maui are split in two locations — a Science Technology Engineering and Math Academy in the Maui Research & Technology Park, and an Arts Academy at the Maui Academy of Performing Arts on Market Street in Wailuku.

The opportunity to consolidate into one campus came up during the charter school's attempts to find one site for all of its programs.

The South Maui Learning Ohana, the governing board for the Kihei Charter School, approved a seven-year lease for approximately 10,000 square feet of space in the Lipoa Center. "This is the perfect place for the school. It's at the center of the community," said Gene Zarro, chairman of the South Maui Learning Ohana and one of the founders of Kihei Charter School.

The lease includes an option to extend two more times for two years. "The most attractive part of this is it gives us an 11-year stability and gives breathing room for us to focus on a high school facility," he said.

The Kihei Public Charter High School operates on a month-to-month lease in the Kihei Commercial Center where Hope Chapel used to be housed. Zarro said the charter high school is exploring different campus options including space in the Maui R&T Park or on privately owned lots.

Meanwhile, the state Department of Education is pursuing the negotiation of nearly 77 acres of property just south of the Kihei Commercial Center to build a more traditional high school.

With less than six months to go before the school year 2009-2010 opening, Christiano expressed confidence that a middle school campus could be established in the



Gene Zarro of Kihei Charter School walks through the future site of his school, lately used by Title Guaranty at the Lipoa Center.

**Kihei Charter School** founders Ray Hart (from left), his wife, Carla Hart, Cheryl Zarro, Diane Parrella, Junius Johnson and Gene Zarro pose in the former Hapa's nightclub Monday morning.



## Information sessions

- **Who:** Kihei Charter School.
- **What:** Information sessions for school year 2009-2010.
- **When:** 4:30 p.m. Tuesday and 7 p.m. March 11.
- **Where:** Kihei Public Charter High School, Kihei Commercial Center.
- **Why:** Families are required to attend an information session where applications for the coming school year will be provided.
- **For more information:** Visit: [www.kiheicharter.org](http://www.kiheicharter.org).

leased space. Parts of the place will have to be demolished, wiring for Internet access will have to be installed and a kitchen in a now-closed Mexican restaurant will have to be revamped.

"Obviously there's a lot of work," he said. Kihei Charter School parents, many of them with expertise in the required renovation work, are "stepping up in the masses" to assist with the job, Christiano said.

The space occupied by Title Guaranty Escrow & Title Services will be used to house Kihei Charter's Virtual Academy for students in kindergarten through 8th grade. The children do most of their school-

work at home, but do check in with the school at least once a week.

Title Guaranty, according to Zarro, is donating its office equipment to the school.

Christiano said he does not anticipate having to purchase new desks or other classroom equipment since all of the things they have will be transferred from the old locations.

Before going public with news about their middle school campus, Kihei Charter School officials met with parents in the middle school programs. Christiano said families recognized the limitations of the current sites, and after a host of questions, appeared to support

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the establishment of one campus.

There are 72 students in the Science Technology Engineering and Math middle school program, and about 51 in the Arts Academy. All together, Kihei Charter School projects a student population of 460 students.

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