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Native Hawaiian leader Charles Maxwell dies at age 74

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Longtime Native Hawaiian Kahu Charles Kauluwehi Maxwell Sr. of Pukalani died Thursday afternoon at Maui Memorial Medical Center after a long illness. He was 74.

Maxwell was ordained as a kahu, or minister, more than 13 years ago, and in August of last year, his health failing, he passed the torch to a grandson, Dane Kiyoshi Uluwehiokalani Maxwell. The ordination allows a kahu to perform Hawaiian spiritual duties.

"A kahu is like a shepherd," Charles Maxwell Sr. said at the time. "It's the one they follow."

A former Maui police officer, Charles Maxwell Sr. was at the center of many Native Hawaiian causes and protests starting in the 1970s, supported sovereignty and was widely recognized as an expert in Hawaiian culture. He and his late wife, Nina, operated the Pukalani Hula Halau.

He was among the leaders of the protests over the military bombing of Kahoolawe, which eventually led to the return and partial cleanup of the island.

He also served as a member of the Hawaii advisory group to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. He helped lead the opposition to the exhumation of Native Hawaiian burials in the '80s at the building site of The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua, in Honokahua.

Work was eventually stopped, the exhumed remains were returned, and the burial site preserved after the developers agreed to move the hotel farther mauka.

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