

Navigators share memories of beloved mentor 'Papa' Mau

"The way of the Turtle"

By Marcel Honoré
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HILLO >> Hokule'a and Hikianalia crews are down to their final days in Hawaii, busy running drills onboard, loading provisions and remembering how far they've come before launching east into the open sea on a daring worldwide sail.

During a panel discussion Friday at the Palace Theater packed to capacity, eight master navigators from around the Pacific relayed the critical role played by their shared mentor: Pius "Mau" Pailug.

"Papa" Mau, a Micronesian master of ancestral navigation techniques, died in 2010. He was the calmest presence in the fiercest storms, his former apprentices told the Palace audience. He once worried that the navigational skills that had been passed down in the Pacific for generations — and which will be used on the upcoming voyage — were about to be lost forever.

Without his guidance, there simply would not be two voyaging canoes em-

barking Tuesday on a three-year "Malama Honua" journey around the globe, they added.

"He was anchored in that place, with no doubt in his mind about where he was and what he needed to do as a navigator, as a farmer, as a father," Hawaiian master navigator Chad Paishon said Friday. "He could do it all, not just navigate. He's the closest that we touch to our kupuna," Paishon added, referring to ancestral Hawaiian navigators.

Several hundred people lined up outside the Palace 40 minutes early to attend the event, as anticipation for the canoes' departure continues to build. Seven other master navigators taught by Pailug joined Paishon onstage — four Hawaiians, two Cook Islanders and one New Zealander. They're in town to help see Hokule'a and Hikianalia off on the sail, a journey expected to log more than 50,000 miles.

The canoes, which left Sand Island last week, are currently anchored in an industrial zone south of downtown Hilo in the small

inlet of Radio Bay. It's also known as Palekai, which locals said means "breakwall" in Hawaiian.

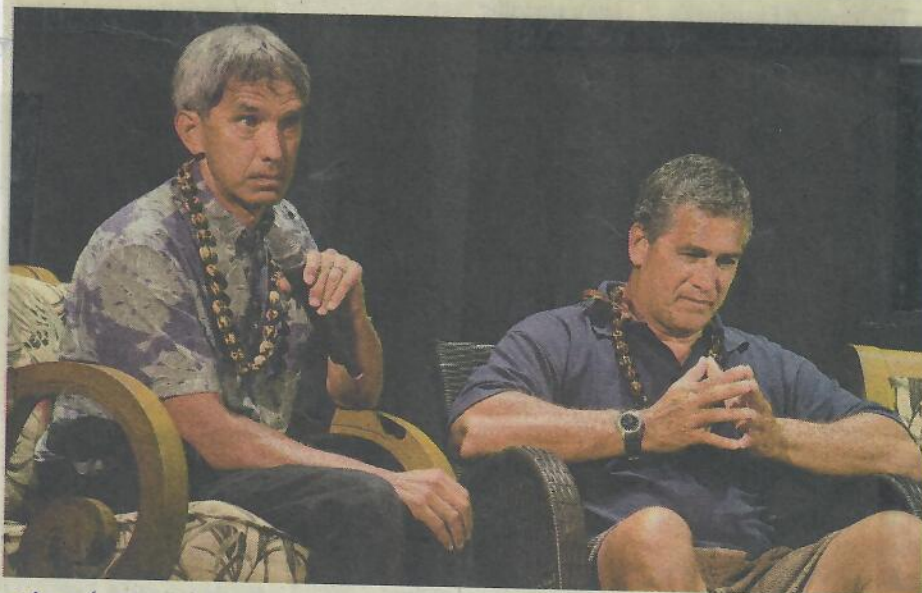
The vessels are expected to leave Tuesday for Tahiti, when the winds are forecast to be more favorable to help the canoes sail well to the east of Hawaii, organizers say.

On Friday crews of the two wa'a (canoes) kept busy sanding the upper hulls of Hokule'a, to give the surface better grip, and running drills out on the ocean on Hikianalia.

Visitors and onlookers also came to check out the canoes Friday. They included Ola Jenkins of Puna, Kelley Stillman of Waiakea and Angie Cominella of Puna. The trio of canoe paddlers briefly left work to give flowers to the crew and take photos in front of the wa'a.

"The canoe carries so much mana, we just wanted to be a part of it," Stillman said.

Earlier in the week, the crews hauled a combined 664 gallons of water and other provisions onto the canoes to prepare them for the Tahiti leg, which is expected



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Nainoa Thompson, left, and Bruce Blankenfeld participated in a discussion after Friday evening's showing of the 1983 documentary "The Navigators: Pathfinders of the Pacific" at the Palace Theater in Hilo.

to take as long as a month.

Decades ago Piailug saw that new generations were losing interest in the ancestral navigational skills that had been passed down in the Pacific for centuries. He worried that the way-finding techniques that helped colonize millions of square miles of ocean were about to slip into oblivion.

"Now only the old men, the men of my generation, love to navigate and want to see it continue," he lamented in the 1983 Sam Low documentary "The Naviga-

tors: Pathfinders of the Pacific." "I'm afraid that after my generation there will be no more navigators."

Piailug reached out beyond his tiny home atoll island of Satawal and started to share his craft with a younger generation of capable apprentices, including Peia Patai, Nainoa Thompson, Shorty Bertelmann, Bruce Blankenfeld and Kalepa Baybayan.

Piailug is now widely credited with keeping the ancient art of way-finding from disappearing. A new mural

with his likeness was recently completed in Kaka'ako, near the corner of Cooke and Auahi streets.

Friday's panel helped affirm that Piailug's fears did not come true and that way-finding is thriving across the Pacific.

"It's a lost talent, yeah?" Patai, a Cook Islander, said earlier Friday, gazing out at Hokule'a in Radio Bay. "And we're bringing it back."

Voyage organizers will hold a final public open house for the canoes 8:30 a.m. to noon Saturday.

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