

SECTION B

DIVERSITY • POLYNESIAN VOYAGING

FRIDAY • APRIL 2, 1999

Hawaiian renaissance mascot carries message with Makali'i

By Yasmin Anwar
ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

A cute green sea turtle with an awfully long name is strapped to the bow of the Makali'i voyager canoe.

Known as Kahuihuikokoamakali'ikauiluna, the eight-inch wooden turtle is the beloved mascot of pupils in early grades at the Punana Leo O Kawaiaha'o Hawaiian language immersion school in Honolulu.

They gave her a grand sendoff when the canoe set sail last November on a pilgrimage to the remote Micronesian island of Satawal in honor of master navigator Mau Piailug. Now, Punana Leo students can't wait to be reunited with their sea turtle. The Makali'i is expected to return to Hawaii in June.

"They're really attached to her," said Wailani Robins, director of Punana Leo O

Kawaiaha'o, which is part of a statewide network of 11 Hawaiian language immersion schools. Aside from tracking the voyage, Punana Leo students have been learning the history of voyager canoes and how to navigate by the stars.

Meanwhile, their ocean-faring sea turtle — more commonly known as kahuihui — has become a symbol of the school's struggle to keep the Hawaiian language alive.

"It's an endangered species just like the Hawaiian language," Robins said.

When the Makali'i returns to Oahu, they will hold a welcome home ceremony for the kahuihui, and receive a journal from the crew written in Hawaiian that documents each step of the journey.

One journal entry that

might be hard for them to stomach is the crew's stop at a Micronesian island where the inhabitants ate sea turtle. But that part probably won't be censored because the children should learn that different people practice different customs, and eating sea turtle is among them, Robins said.

Eventually, the Makali'i journal will be incorporated into the curriculum at Punana Leo — where most students speak fluent Hawaiian — and could possibly be used in other schools across the state, Robins said. It will also be displayed at the Ocean Festival on July 24.

Traditionally, Hawaiian history has been passed down in oral narrative or song, but the Makali'i journal is to be part of written history.