

HAWAII

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Turtles get their freedom today

□ Four go to sea
off the Kohala Coast
from a hotel's ponds

By David Oshiro
Star-Bulletin

WATCH out, Donatello!
Look out, Leonardo!
Step aside, Raphael!
The Teenage Mutant
Ninja Turtles may be heroes to mil-
lions of kiddies, but today at the
Mauna Lani Bay Hotel on the Kohala
Coast of the Big Island, they took a
back seat a quartet of Hawaiian
green sea turtles.

The green sea turtles — they don't
have names — celebrated Indepen-
dence Day today.

The young turtles were released
this morning from courtyard ponds
at the Kohala hotel to begin life in
the wild.

The reptiles are about 2 years old

and have spent around eight months
at the hotel. They are part of a
program started at Sea Life Park to
give the federally protected species
a chance to enter the ocean as
adolescents rather than helpless
youngsters.

"As young hatchlings, their mor-
tality rate is pretty high because
there are so many predators out
there," said Daniel Akaka Jr., Hawai-
ian historian for the Mauna Lani
resort.

The resort was chosen for the
program by Sea Life Park because a
natural turtle seaweed feeding area
lies offshore, Akaka said.

At a low-key celebration today,
staff members, guests and visitors
snacked on turtle-shaped cookies
and were given turtle memorabilia,
including caps and buttons.

"This is nice way to let everybody
know that we're trying to do our
part to convince the public that they
can help save endangered species,"
Akaka said.