



Danny Akaka is state's Ambassador of Aloha

Story and Turtle Independence Day photos by Fern Gavelek

Big Island resident Danny Akaka of the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows is one of four individuals honored this year by the statewide Aloha Festivals for exemplifying this year's theme, "Na Honu Hawaii—The Spirit Within." Akaka has been named an Ambassador of Aloha and will ride in the Aloha Festivals Floral Parade on Oahu September 17 with turtle expert George Balazs, limu scientist Dr. Isabella Abbott and Donna Kahakui, long distance paddler for ocean awareness.

Besides being a Hawaiian kahu (priest), musician and ocean navigator, Danny Akaka has been the resident Hawaiian historian and director of cultural affairs at the Mauna Lani Resort for more than 20 years. He is one of the caretakers of the resort's Turtle Ambassador Program and believes "understanding the plight of the honu is to malama 'aina, or take care of our surroundings."

The Mauna Lani's Turtle Ambassador Program was pioneered 16 years ago by Oahu's Sea Life Park and the resort. Every year, anywhere from a few dozen to a few hundred sea turtles hatch at the park from brood stock the park has owned since the early 1970s (prior to the Endangered Species Act). Most are tagged with National Marine Fisheries Service tags and released into the ocean in the first 24 hours of their life, but a few turtles are sent to qualified facilities like the Mauna Lani, as part of an educational loan program.

While the honu are in residence at the Mauna Lani, hundreds of school children are brought annually to the hotel to enjoy a lively tour of the saltwater ponds. They learn about the turtles and other marine life: sharks, puffer fish and a wide variety of tropical fish. The Mauna Lani serves as ambassador to the honu for a couple years until they reach a size and weight deemed appropriate for release into the wild. Before release, honu undergo a veterinary check.

On July Fourth ("Turtle Independence Day"), the captive-raised turtles are gathered and escorted to the ocean as Akaka blows the conch shell. This year, Halau Hula O Kukunaokala performed a special dance and chant to honor two sacred honu. "In Old Hawai'i, some turtles were considered sacred. The hula they performed told about the meeting of 'Ea'Ea, the female guardian turtle that belonged to the Kona Chieftess Keakealaniwahine, and Kaiaka, the sacred male turtle from Molokai," explains Akaka.

"The honu is a cultural symbol for Hawaiians and for some, their 'aumakua (personal family guardian or deity)," he continues. "It was kapu (forbidden) for a person to eat turtle meat if the honu was his 'aumakua." Ancient Hawaiians had a symbiotic relationship with their 'aumakau—they did not harm or eat it and the 'aumakua warned and reprimanded humans in dreams and visions. Akaka adds that turtles were a source of food for other Hawaiians, but only ali'i could raise turtles in loko (ponds) for food.

Turtle's homing ability

"Since we started the program, we've released over 150 honu," says Akaka. Some of them are tagged with monitoring devices to track their navigation by George Balazs, a NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service Protected Species biologist, also being honored in the Oahu parade. (See next page.)

"Protecting our honu and ocean is one aspect of malama aina," explains Akaka. "Hawaiians believe everything is interconnected and if one aspect or link is missing, then there cannot be a whole. If there is a missing part, then things don't balance." Akaka adds that honu are survivors since prehistoric times and it is important we learn from them. "They are the ultimate navigators," he says. "They return home."

Both Akaka and Balazs contributed to the International Year of the Ocean Sea Turtles Coloring Book, available online by visiting www.yoto98.noaa.gov/books/seaturtles/seaturtle1.htm. They modified the book for use in Hawaii and it is in both Hawaiian and English text. For more info on Hawaiian honu, a suggested website is www.turtles.org.

Sick turtle hotline. To report what appears to be a sick, injured or dead sea turtle in West Hawaii, contact the Hawaii Preparatory Academy Sea Turtle Hotline at 881-4200 or the DNL Enforcement Division of Conservation and Resources, 327-4961.



Danny Akaka sits on the steps of the Eva Parker Woods cottage at Mauna Lani prior to a "Talk Story" evening (see next page). Left: Akaka blows the conch at the Mauna Lani Resort's Turtle Independence Day on July 4.



A hui ho honu!

Turtles raised as part of the Turtle Ambassador Program at Mauna Lani Resort are released when a few years old. The honu are tagged, given a health check, and with much fanfare and the sound of the conch shell, they are transported in an Independence Day decorated cart and released into the Pacific. For more info about the honu, visit www.maunalaniculture.org.



Oahu turtle czar works closely with Big Island to ensure turtles' future

George Balazs, a NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service Protected Species biologist on Oahu, has devoted his 34-year career to the recovery of the Hawaiian green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and recently was honored by the National Wildlife Federation with its National Conservation Achievement Award.

Through the use of radio telemetry, Balazs tracks where turtles go. One Mauna Lani turtle made the news after a nine-month, 3,000-mile journey around the Hawaiian Islands before returning to the Mauna Lani area. "Turtles have a great homing ability and this turtle returned to the coastline it was released from," explains the Hawaiian honu expert. Following migration routes of tagged honu could possibly lead to guidelines for longline fishing boats.

According to Balazs, turtles practice "natal homing," returning "to the sands of their birth" to replenish the next generation, and the next, and so on. "Sands of their birth doesn't mean a specific spot with perfection," stresses Balazs. "It sometimes is a strip of coastline some miles long; or it's a cluster of small islands a few or more miles from one another. In addition there are strays."

Balazs says this is good because for sea turtles to survive, adapt and endure over the centuries, they need to be flexible. "Sea levels rise, and fall. Island and coastal areas sink and are eroded away. New nesting areas have to be found and that's how it's most likely done, by turtles 'missing their mark' occasionally," he continues.



Students valuable field assistants

Students, including youth from Hawaii Preparatory Academy (below), serve as field assistants for Balazs to hand capture, tag and measure turtles around the Big Island. Learning hands-on the importance of science, data collection and teamwork, HPA students also assist with the Mauna Lani program. Info is entered into a database to learn more about the reptile's biology. Areas studied include honu growth rate, habitat use, behaviors, developmental and reproductive migrations and population trends.

In fact, Balazs led research from 1967-2004 that showed a 600 percent increase in nesting females on East Island, an isolated atoll in the French Frigate Shoals of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

The Shoals is the principal rookery for the Hawaiian green turtle and at least 50 percent of all nesting occurs on East Island. "Hawaiian green turtle population is well on the way to recovery," Balazs emphasizes. He attributes much of the population increase to the Endangered Species Act; he was instrumental in getting the honu listed in 1978. But he also believes education has changed perceptions about sea turtles from a source of food to a native species people are proud to protect. (See story by Balazs on page 30.)

"Twilight at Kalahuipua'a"



Every month when the full moon rises, Mauna Lani Resort offers an enchanted evening of entertainment on the lawn of the resort's oceanfront Eva Parker Woods Cottage. Hotel guests and Hawaii residents are all welcome to join Danny Kaniela Akaka for "Twilight at Kalahuipua'a," a night of music, dance and storytelling.

Danny Kaniela Akaka is one of Hawaii's most famous personalities and Mauna Lani's 'Native Son.' No one knows more about the legends of Hawaii than Danny. He Mauna Lani's Cultural Historian. He is a kahu (Hawaiian priest), speaks fluent Hawaiian, performs as a musician and dancer, has twice sailed with the Hokule'a (Hawaii's famed ocean-voyaging canoe), and is a caretaker of Mauna Lani's endangered Hawaiian green sea turtle program. He is young, energetic, full of life, and the father of five children, including a set of twins.

"Twilight at Kalahuipua'a" was designed to perpetuate the traditional folk art of storytelling. Everyone in attendance - not only the professional entertainment - is invited to share stories, family histories, songs, and dance. It gives hotel guests a chance to experience the true aloha spirit, and residents the opportunity to meet and share stories with people from around the world.

The charming Eva Parker Woods Cottage houses historical artifacts that were excavated at Kalahuipua'a, the land now called Mauna Lani. Its oceanfront location marks the piko (spiritual center) of the resort's ancient Hawaiian fishponds, making it the perfect venue for this full moon event.

Exciting Shops
Great Restaurants
Convenient Services



Parker Ranch
Museum &
Visitor Center

PARKER RANCH CENTER

We're Rounding Up the Best for You!

2nd Annual Waimea Festival

Sunday, August 28 • 11am-3pm



- 🐮 Free Hawaiian Entertainment by Top Island Performers
- 🐮 Free Fire-Roasted Island Beef Tastings
- 🐮 Traditional Hawaiian Arts & Crafts by Local Artisans
- 🐮 Historical & Astronomy Exhibits

Plus much more with over 50 Exhibitors and Entertainers!
For more information call 329-0833

At the Crossroads of Waimea

Mamalahoa Hwy. 19

GMR LLC, Manager and Leasing Agent for Parker Ranch Center
Lisa Purdy status photo courtesy of the Parko Preservation Society

ALOHA FESTIVALS



2005

P.67&30

Nā Honu Hawai'i

Aloha Festivals theme celebrates

The Spirit Within

a tribute to the Hawaiian
life of land and sea

Attend Big Island events

**August 27 thru
September 25**



OFFICIAL BIG ISLAND PROGRAM GUIDE