A Sensational Opening in Waikiki

There will be lots of excitement in Waikiki next week as internationally renowned singer, songwriter, author and businessman Jimmy Buffett launches his latest restaurant and bar at the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber. Known as Jimmy Buffet’s at the Beachcomber, it is going to be sensational and the highlight of the $21 million renovation of that hotel.

Members of our ‘ohana who have been invited to enjoy some of the sample meals and exotic libations as the restaurant staff has fine-tuned its skills are really pumped up. One told me, “Jimmy Buffet’s has taken restaurant design to a whole new level—it is not just a place to eat—it is an experience. The décor is like no other—from the ‘lava’ flowing across the Hot Spot Bar to the great collection of surfboards in the Surfing Museum, it is the most amazing place.”

The public opening at 10 o’clock Monday morning also carries an encouraging message for all of Hawaii. It means 329 new jobs on site and countless other jobs for the companies serving and supplying the facility. It means increased tax revenues and some timely and favorable international publicity. With all the doom and gloom in the media today, this high-profile restaurant could not be opening at a better time.

Jimmy Buffett has been interested in Hawaii for many years. He is quoted in recent articles in USA TODAY and Hotel Interactive as saying, “From the first time I rode a wave at Canoes in Waikiki, I began to figure out how I could get back to Hawaii on a more regular basis to that One Particular Harbor. . . . Now, with the partnership of the great folks at Outrigger Hotels, I have realized my dream and we will soon be open in Waikiki. I have had a long love affair with Hawaii and her people. Mark Twain called these ‘the loveliest fleet of islands anchored in any ocean,’ and I couldn’t agree more. I have written many stories and songs inspired by my time in Hawaii and can’t wait to see what the future holds in the land that is so far but yet so near.”

Four years ago, Buffett tried to find a place for a restaurant in the International Marketplace, across the street from the Outrigger Waikiki, but negotiations fell through. Outrigger’s Barbara Campbell (Vice President, Retail Development & Leasing) jumped in and suggested he consider the venue in the nearby OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber that was used only part-time by Hawaii entertainment legend Don Ho and the Elvis impressionist show, “Blue Hawaii.” A deal was struck, and a lot of hard work and money have been spent to get ready for opening night.

As one pundit put it, “This is not some beach shack.” The 21,000-square-foot restaurant can seat 400. Adjacent to the entrance from the hotel lobby, Buffett has his vast collection of surfing memorabilia in the Honolulu Surfing Museum. At street level, a shop will sell a wide variety of tropical logo items including lots of “Parrothead” gear.

According to Jimmy Buffett’s Web site, margaritaville.com, and other sources, Buffett was born on Christmas Day in 1946 in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and was educated in Catholic schools and, later, at Auburn University and the University of Southern Mississippi. He began his musical career in the 1960s and paid his bills with tips he earned from tourists for sidewalk performances in New Orleans. He moved to Key West, Florida, where he blended his country, folk, rock and pop music with tropical themes to produce what is called a “gulf and western” style. In 1985, he opened the first of a series of “Margaritaville” restaurants in Key West.
Buffett has been on a roll ever since, releasing recordings, going on concert tours, writing books, acting in films and expanding his restaurant and business empire. He has released over 30 albums, with eight Gold Albums and nine Platinum or Multi-Platinum awards. His song “It’s 5 O’clock Somewhere” won a Country Music Award.

At age 62, Buffett remains as busy as ever. He is working on Margaritaville Casino Atlantic City, scheduled to open this summer, and, in partnership with Harrah’s Entertainment, he is planning to open Margaritaville Casino & Resort in Biloxi, Mississippi, in 2010.

This year, Buffett will also do a concert tour, Summerzcool 2009, which includes a stop on Maui on February 24 and a performance at the Waikiki Shell on February 28. (Ticket sales for the Waikiki concert start at 9 a.m. today, January 31, at Ticketmaster – ticketmaster.com or 877-750-4400).

Jimmy Buffett’s at the Beachcomber will serve three meals a day beginning with breakfast at 7 a.m. on the lanai. The fun really starts at 6:30 p.m. with snacks, signature drinks and entertainment around the open pool area. At 9:30 p.m., things move to the inside stage and keep rocking until 12:30 a.m. A variety of local entertainers, including Hawaii’s musical prodigy Taimane, will perform nightly, and I am sure Buffett will have more reason now than ever to visit Hawaii and appear at the first restaurant bearing his name when he is in town.

Aloha, Jimmy. We are delighted to have you join our ‘ohana!