This week, I had the pleasure of participating in a Hawaiian blessing ceremony marking the conclusion of the $21 million makeover of the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber—and what a wonderful transformation it is. I have to congratulate everyone who was involved, from start to finish. The hotel’s guest rooms, lobby, and porte cochere have all been updated with an Island contemporary design. Jimmy Buffett’s at the Beachcomber, with its Honolulu Surfing Museum and Margaritaville Retail Shop, has joined the dazzling “Magic of Polynesia” show with John Hirokawa and Macy’s as great on-site entertainment and shopping options. There’s also a brand new fitness room and business center.

I told those gathered for the blessing that being back at the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber evoked many memories of growing up in Waikiki in the 1930s and 40s.

Until 1947, I lived with my family about a block away from where the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber is now located. In those days, trolley buses ran up and down Kalakaua Avenue, with spring-loaded booms reaching skyward to grab electric power from a network of overhead wires. When they came to a junction where other wires branched off, sparks would fly from the end of the boom. That excited a young boy’s heart!

The sidewalks on Kalakaua only partially covered the space from a row of shops to the roadway, leaving a strip of dirt that was baked to a fine powder by the tropical sun. I would walk up and down those strips in my bare feet and smile, as the hot powder squeezed up between my toes.

On the spot where the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber would be built years later, there was a store first called Waikiki Drug Company and later, the Waikiki Pharmacy, complete with an old-fashioned soda fountain that made the best strawberry ice cream sodas I have ever tasted. The cost was around 25 cents!

About 1950, the pharmacy was replaced with a Liberty House store that sold beachwear, muumuu, and tropical fashions to the slowly-increasing numbers of tourists. Some would stay at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel across the street, while those on a budget would stay with our company’s founders, Roy and Estelle Kelley, at the Islander Hotel a block away on Seaside Avenue. I was the young kid behind the Front Desk checking people in and out, working the plugs of the old-fashioned manual telephone switchboard, or serving breakfast under the kiawe trees with my sisters Jean and Pat.

Fast forward to today. All the recent upgrades and improvements have made the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber a brand new product and a “star” OHANA property, as well as contributing to the tremendous renaissance that is reinvigorating Waikiki and restoring its reputation as the world’s leading island resort destination.

People are already taking notice of the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber. In a just-published hotel review in the travel trade magazine TravelAge West, the headline says it all – “Beachcomber buff-up delivers.” The writer goes on to declare the hotel’s upgrades “right on target” and concludes by saying, “For my money, the hotel’s spiffed-up accommodations and attractive rates poise it on the verge of becoming one of the destination’s hottest off-beach options.” Oh, how true!

When Outrigger took the hotel over in 2005, it had been 20 years since its last major renovation. While a number of soft touch-ups had taken place over the years, the property had not received the kind of “TLC” it deserved until Outrigger and our partner Rockpoint Group assumed ownership.

Today, the guest rooms at the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber feature a rejuvenated look with a contemporary design: neutral hues, sandstone accents, new carpeting, and hardwood furnishings. Each guest room also boasts custom-made bedding for restful sleep and 32-inch flat-screen television. Bathrooms are completely updated with granite countertops, wall-mounted mirrors, and decorative light fixtures. Upgrades to the lobby and port cochere mirror this aesthetic by offering a more spacious and comfortable entry and check-in process.

The hotel has always been one of Waikiki’s hidden gems, but with the wonderful changes and great value it now offers, the secret is out! You can’t beat its location in the center of Waikiki—just steps from the beach, directly across from the newly-revamped Royal Hawaiian Center and the Outrigger Waikiki, and adjacent to the International Market Place.

It took 18 months, $21 million, the dedicated efforts of our Projects Team, and the highest quality of service and ho’okipa by the hotel staff to bring the OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber through the full construction and renovation process. Mahalo to everyone who had a hand in this first-class project.