Sharing Aloha
Even in Busy Times

The official numbers are in for January – and preliminary numbers for February – and they were among the busiest months ever recorded in our industry in Hawaii. I think that everyone is pleased to see such a success of our multi-year effort to get Travel and Tourism back on the pre-9/11 track.

According to the State of Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT), January 2006 was strong in nearly every way the visitor industry is measured.

• Visitor Arrivals rose by 3.9 percent
• Visitor Days jumped by 4.5 percent
• Visitor Spending increased by 9.8 percent

Almost every island participated in the growth, with Kauai, Maui, Molokai, and Lanai posting double-digit percentage increases in Visitor Arrivals. Cruise passengers who flew to the state to board Hawaii-home-ported cruise ships were up 59.4 percent from January 2005.

That pace of tourism translates into benefits for everyone, everywhere in our state. We all share in the success of our state’s most powerful “economic engine.” This has been clearly confirmed by any number of economic studies and data gathered by DBEDT.

For the members of our ‘ohana who have been working directly with our visitors, few needed a newspaper article or spreadsheet to find out that these last two months were among the busiest ever recorded in our industry. Many have been working literally around the clock to keep up with the increased demands of higher hotel occupancies.

The real challenge is to keep the level of hospitality, service, and Aloha high when the hotels are running at or near capacity night after night. Greeting guests, providing help, and extending the true warmth of Aloha sometimes gives way to just barely getting your job done, so you can go home, get some rest, and get ready for the next day.

I can remember having that feeling myself, particularly during the Vietnam War when thousands of members of the military flew into Honolulu to meet family members for a brief period of Rest and Relaxation (R&R). Night after night, all Waikiki properties were running 100 percent plus. Every day was a challenge that required teamwork, planning, and flawless execution. I am sure that I was not always as friendly and hospitable as I should have been.

I know that today, we are providing the finest in hospitality at all Outrigger and OHANA hotels and condominiums. I see it myself when I visit our properties across the Pacific. I am also told this frequently by people who write, call, or send me an e-mail about what a special time they had at one of our properties. This week was no exception, and I have already had three conversations along those lines with recent guests. One was with the daughter of a 90-year-old lady who could not say enough about how well her mother was treated at the Outrigger Waikiki.

As we go into the final few weeks of peak season, take a few moments to catch your breath and reflect on your job and your fellow workers. I think you will agree that, no matter how busy things get, Outrigger and OHANA are great places to work and grow.

Then refocus on the guests you see crossing the lobby or coming down the corridor. They are not just the couple from Oregon in Room 203. They are probably very nice, hard-working people, just like you, who have likely saved for years to take a dream vacation to Waikiki.

For that couple, what you do or what you say in the next few minutes or seconds will make all the difference in the world. It will determine whether they come back again, and what they tell friends and family about their experience here. If they’re really happy,
the good things they’ll say will bring more guests – even when the economy slows down, as it inevitably will, and we need every visitor we can attract. So share the Aloha – it’s magic!