This week, on St. Patrick’s Day, I joined many members of our ‘ohana to mark the end of Outrigger’s association with the OHANA Waikiki West. Nearly all of the hotel’s staff gathered on property to share lunch and many memories of years gone by. In the paragraphs below is an edited version of the comments I made that day.

Good morning. Happy St. Patrick’s Day and ALOHA! I am very pleased to be with you in person as we mark this important milestone.

Let’s think for a moment about what this gathering represents. We are here because we are experiencing a significant change in our company as well our individual lives.

- Life is full of changes.
- Our own birth was a drastic change.
- Every day of our lives, there are changes in our bodies.
- Change happens not only to us as individuals, but to companies, institutions, cities, countries and the world too.

As many of you know, I was born in Hawai‘i, as was my sister Jean who is also here with us today. We lived just a little over a block from here near the corner of Kūhiō Avenue and Nohonani Street. The building that was the home for our family still stands although its uses have changed drastically along with practically everything else in Waikiki.

In the 1930s, Kūhiō Avenue came to dead end in front of our house at Nohonani. There was a fence and the land on the other side of it, toward Diamond Head, was dedicated to back-of-the-house facilities for the Moana and Royal Hawaiian hotels – laundry, storage, equipment and so forth.

The fence also marked the boundary of the property owned by the Estate of Queen Emma, the wife of King Alexander Liholiho ‘Iolani, Kamehameha IV, who had lived on these lands almost 100 years before Jean and I and our parents, Roy and Estelle Kelley, did. The area

Standing: Han Bin Lin and Dr. Chuck Kelley
Sitting: Wan Mei Lin, Tracy Xu and Estela Lau

Andres Malong, Orilno Esmeralda, Dr. Richard Kelley, Nui Kauhane, Roy Beppu and Evan Leung
was full of ponds and small streams fed by water coming from Mānoa Valley in the Koʻolau Mountains a few miles away.

At the Queen Emma lands’ shoreline, the Outrigger Canoe Club occupied the site where the Outrigger Waikiki Beach Resort now stands. This acre and a half of choice beachfront property between the Moana and Seaside hotels (the latter on the site of the present Royal Hawaiian), had been leased to the Outrigger Canoe Club years earlier by the Estate of Queen Emma for an annual payment of $10. Just offshore was some of the best surfing to be found on O‘ahu. The club’s lease expired in 1963 and our company had secured a new lease with an obligation to build a deluxe hotel on the site. (At the time, our company was not yet called Outrigger Hotels. We renamed it – for the canoe club that had previously occupied the spot – only after the hotel opened.)

Agreeing to build the hotel was a gamble because fewer than 500,000 visitors came to Hawai‘i in 1963. My parents took the bet in the hope that business would grow. And, with a lot of hard work both by our family on the hotel and by them and many others on efforts to boost tourism in Hawai‘i, business did grow. Four years later, in 1967, when the Outrigger Waikiki Hotel opened, Hawai‘i’s visitor arrivals had more than doubled – to 1.1 million.

Back at about the time the lease on that land became available, United Airlines and Pan American World Airways had told Hawai‘i’s leaders they wanted to abandon propeller-driven planes and serve Hawai‘i with the new jets that had just begun entering into service. To do that, Hawai‘i’s airports would need more and longer runways, boarding ramps, hangars, etc.

People were shocked and many started talking about restricting the development of new hotels.

Those who controlled the Queen Emma Estate asked Roy Kelley to help them quickly develop not only the hotel on the beachfront site, but three other new properties before a hotel building moratorium could be instituted. He agreed, even though nobody was sure where the customers would come from to fill all the new rooms.

In this property, the OHANA West – one of those four new hotels – Roy placed a kitchenette in every
second room so they could be converted into studio or one-bedroom apartments that could be rented out on a monthly basis if the hoped-for increase in visitor numbers did not materialize.

In 1973, shortly after this building, then known as the Outrigger West, opened, 2.6 million visitors arrived in Hawai‘i, almost all of them on then-state-of-the-art jet planes.

The 1977 opening of the Reef Runway at Honolulu International Airport and the dropping of many strict federal air-travel regulations in 1978 were two other very important changes in the Hawai‘i tourism picture.

Together, those changes helped the Hawai‘i visitor industry grow, exceeding the wildest predictions. Last year, 2014, Hawai‘i hosted nearly 8.4 million visitors from countries around the world – nearly 17 times as many visitors as we had in 1963, just five decades earlier.

Now, 42 years after we opened the Outrigger West, our land lease has expired and the Estate of Queen Emma has selected a new group of developers and operators to go forward from now on.

Many members of the new team have deep local connections. Several are friends. I wish them all the very best.

Yes, this moment means significant changes for a great many people.

Ruthann Yamanaka and her team in HR, particularly Janice Yee, Kathy Oyadomari and Trina Tory, have done a wonderful job of putting together a number of options so the vast majority of those who have been working at OHANA Waikiki West can choose at least two future paths.

• Many will take this opportunity to retire. This includes Ronald Ogata and “Junior” Tateyama, both of whom have been on the Bell Desk for all 42 years since the hotel opened!

• A very high percentage of those who wish to continue working have or will find positions in other Outrigger or OHANA properties in Waikiki.

Module 4 >> 4
In closing, I would like to add this thought: Although I have emphasized today that change is inevitable in our lives, our country and even our world, some things, in me, do not change.

I want you to know that I will always have a great deal of admiration, respect and love for all who have been a part of our ‘ohana. What you have succeeded in doing on a daily basis at this hotel for as many as 42 years makes me humble, makes me thankful and makes me proud.

To each and every one of you, Mahalo.

MAHALO NUI LOA and ALOHA!