2011 Chairman’s Award Goes to Charlene Goo

By Dr. Chuck Kelley

At this year’s Po‘okela Awards ceremony on Wednesday, I was delighted to present the 2011 Chairman’s Award to Charlene Goo.

Created 24 years ago by Dr. Richard Kelley, the Chairman’s Award is presented to a member of our senior executive team who has distinguished him- or herself through exceptional contributions to the success of our company.

Charlene is a most deserving recipient and we congratulate her on this accomplishment. She recently returned to Honolulu from 10 very successful years on Guam where she oversaw the operations of our Outrigger Guam Resort with true Outrigger hospitality.

Charlene joins an elite group of Outrigger team members, some of them now “alumni,” who have earned this award – Fran Kirk, Tom Burke, Bill Sthay, Michael Devich, Joe Durocher, Perry Sorenson, Mel Wilinsky, Mel Kaneshige, Barry Wallace, Max Sword, Dorsey Brady, Alan White, Barbara Campbell, Chuck Shishido, Danny Ojiri and Bill Peters.

Before joining our Outrigger ‘ohana, Charlene was already an experienced hotelier, having started her career at the Hawaiian Regent Hotel in Waikiki while still a teenager. After college she worked at the Kona Surf Hotel on the Big Island and later helped open the Mauna Lani Hotel. A few years later she was working at the Keauhou Beach Hotel when it suddenly changed ownership. She managed the closing of the hotel – with 36 hours’ notice! During that hectic transition, she met Barry Wallace, which may have started her down the path to future employment at Outrigger.

Charlene grew up in Hawai‘i and in her early career collected experiences in a wide variety of hotel departments including finance, sales and marketing, human resources, catering, housekeeping, front office, policy development, safety, security and guest relations, all of which she would later put to good use at the Outrigger Guam Resort.

When she arrived on Guam in 2002, Charlene immediately fell in love with the people and the community. As in Hawai‘i, the people of Guam have a love of good food and put on a wonderful fiesta (li‘i’a) for important events. Charlene especially learned to love a local specialty known as kelaguen, a traditional dish of the Mariana Islands’ native Chamorro people. Many who move to Guam immediately start gaining weight thanks to all the delicious food. To keep this from happening to her, Charlene took up jogging at 5 a.m. under the street lights, a habit she maintains now that she is back in Honolulu.

Charlene’s first year in Guam was most memorable as the island suffered a series of natural disasters. The earthquake that struck three weeks after she arrived did not damage the hotel and neither did Typhoon Chata’aan three months later, but Super Typhoon Pongsoma devastated the island and the hotel. Looking back, Charlene was impressed with how amazingly resilient
the people were, with employees coming to work and serving guests even though their own homes had been destroyed. The guests were likewise so impressed with the hospitality that none filed complaints or claims even though many were greatly inconvenienced, losing belongings and being trapped on the island for days. Many of our guests at the time attributed their having come through safely to Charlene’s leadership, persistence, boundless energy and commitment to the property.

On Guam, business relationships are often built on the golf course, so Charlene dutifully brushed up on her golf and learned to do business on the greens.

She also jumped into the local business community with both feet, soon becoming active on the boards of the Guam Employers Council, the Guam Chamber of Commerce and the Salvation Army as well as, eventually, the chairwoman of the Guam Hotel & Restaurant Association.

As Mildred Courtney notes, Charlene is good at working with people, being observant and being a good listener. While in Guam she used those skills to personally build relationships with several branches of the military and secure more business for the hotel while serving on the Andersen Air Force Base Civilian Advisory Committee and the U.S. Navy League’s Guam Council.

In her 10 years with Outrigger, Charlene has made an outsized impact on our company, very much in contrast to her diminutive, under-five-foot stature. Today, Charlene’s responsibilities span the Pacific. She now oversees the operations of the Embassy Suites® – Waikiki Beach Walk® and the Holiday Inn® Waikiki Beachcomber Resort – while still continuing to oversee our Guam operations.

Now that Charlene is back on O’ahu, she is already a member of the Hawai‘i Lodging and Tourism Association, and the Hotel Operator’s Roundtable, in addition to remaining on the board of the Guam Chamber, thanks to her continuing oversight of our property there. Perhaps her most challenging assignment today is her need to quickly assimilate the brand standards of our two national franchise organizations.

With the Chairman’s Award, we recognize Charlene’s many accomplishments and the significant impact she has had on helping Outrigger expand its reach across the Pacific.

Warmest congratulations, Charlene! Well done!