Dr. Richard Kelley nominated for “Hotelier of the World” award

By Dr. Chuck Kelley

I was delighted to learn earlier this week that Dr. Richard Kelley has been nominated as a finalist for HOTELS magazine’s Hotelier of the World award for 2015! Now in its 35th year, HOTELS magazine’s Hotelier of the World awards recognize individuals who have had distinguished careers rather than the companies they represent. “Criteria include how nominees have defined standards of service; overall operational excellence and performance; demonstrated creativity in management and style; and what they have done to improve and promote the global hotel industry.” There are two award categories: “Corporate” for hoteliers representing multiple properties and “Individual” for hoteliers representing a single unique property.

When Dr. Kelley was growing up in the Territory of Hawai‘i, one would hardly have guessed that he might someday be a leader in the global hotel industry. Back then, Hawai‘i had an agricultural economy where jobs outside the sugar and pineapple plantations were scarce and mostly found in one of the “Big Five” companies that dominated business and politics in the Islands. The tourism industry was in its infancy. Richard’s parents, Roy and Estelle Kelley, were renting out apartments, not hotel rooms. Richard sensibly chose to pursue a medical career and headed off to Stanford University and Harvard Medical School with the goal of returning to Hawai‘i as a physician. But life has a funny way of changing people’s plans. As the Hawai‘i hotel industry began to bloom in the 1960s, Roy and Estelle’s “mom and pop” apartment business evolved into a small local hotel chain. At first, Richard helped his parents in his “spare time” between a busy medical practice and raising five children. Before too long, his moonlighting in the family business grew to the point that he was in charge of the Outrigger Waikiki Hotel and it was all he could do to just keep his medical license current by attending weekly medical conferences.

For Richard, assuming a leadership role in the family hotel business meant hanging up his white coat and taking up computer programming to design the original programs that ran Stellex (Outrigger’s first computerized reservations system, named in honor of his mother, Estelle, the company’s pioneer reservations specialist) and transforming the business with a network of computers serving what eventually grew to 16 Outrigger Hotels in Waikīkī. What seems obvious today took tremendous foresight and perseverance in past years when computers were novel, limited in capability and uncertain in performance.

Leading Outrigger Hotels also meant personally establishing relationships beyond Hawai‘i’s traditional leisure markets on the U.S. West Coast. Dr. Kelley, like others in the Hawai‘i visitor industry, often traveled west to develop individual and group markets in Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Southeast Asia.

Realizing the economic advantages for Hawai‘i to play in the national and international convention market, he also spent 15 years driving the political process needed to fund and build a convention center in Waikīkī. For his efforts and achievements, Sales & Marketing Executives International (SMEI) Honolulu named him the “Father of the Hawaii Convention Center.”

Dr. Kelley has been active in a number of organizations that strive to improve business both locally and globally. He served as chair of the ‘Hawai‘i Visitors Bureau (now, thanks to the Convention Center whose creation he fathered, the Hawai‘i Visitors and Convention Bureau). For over 20 years, he has been a member of the executive committee of the London-based World Travel & Tourism...
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Council (WTTC), which has played a critical role in bringing to policy makers’ attention the enormous contribution that Travel & Tourism makes to the global economy.

Dr. Kelley’s interests extend far beyond the hospitality business. A champion of better education, he served as chair of Hawai‘i Commission on Performance Standards in an effort to help improve the state’s public schools. He was chair of the Board of Trustees at Punahou School and was later a trustee of Kent Denver School. He is currently a University of Denver trustee.

Thanks to his continuing passion for medicine and health care, he has served on the boards of Craig Hospital and the Colorado Neurological Institute, both of which are located near his current home in Denver. He has delivered many lectures and written numerous articles on the economics of health care. While still practicing medicine, he served, in a volunteer capacity, as associate professor of pathology at the University of Hawai‘i’s John A. Burns School of Medicine.

Throughout his career, Dr. Kelley has never forgotten the importance of listening to the customer. Even today, at age 81, he is often found talking to or corresponding with wholesale suppliers and return guests.

Dr. Kelley treats hosts like old friends, spending many hours visiting their workplaces, listening to concerns, and motivating everyone to provide the best possible service to guests.

Together with his son-in-law, David Carey, he grew that small Waikiki hotel company into one of Hawai‘i’s largest businesses. Today, Outrigger continues to grow, with upscale properties stretching halfway around the globe.

The HOTELS magazine’s Hotelier of the World award winner will be announced at the magazine’s annual banquet this fall in New York and profiled in a cover story. No one yet knows who will receive the award. The competition is tough. There are three other “Corporate” category nominees, each with highly impressive careers and outstanding companies:

- **Mark Harmon**, founder and managing partner of the Auberge Resort Collection, which currently has eight deluxe resorts and residence clubs in well-known destinations such as Aspen, Telluride, Napa Valley, British West Indies, Cabo San Lucas and Fiji. Five additional resorts are scheduled to join the group in the next two years.
- **Jean-Gabriel Peres**, president and CEO of Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts, with 82 properties and 20,000 rooms in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.
- **Richard Solomons**, CEO of the InterContinental Hotel Group (IHG), “the world’s largest hotel company by number of rooms” with, currently, 4,840 hotels and 710,295 rooms plus an additional 1,221 hotels and 193,772 rooms in the pipeline (as of December 31, 2014).

Last year’s Corporate category winner was Christopher Nassetta, president and CEO of Hilton Worldwide. Our best wishes to Dr. Kelley in this competition.

See how you can vote for Dr. Kelley!
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LET’S HELP DR. KELLEY WIN THE AWARD BY VOTING ONLINE!

• Go to www.facebook.com/HOTELSmag (This opens HOTELS magazine’s Facebook page).

• Click on the April 9 post showing the cover of the April issue of HOTELS magazine (with the photo of Bill Marriott – you will probably have to scroll down to April 9 to find the post).

• This will take you to the magazine’s contents page. Scroll down to the third item, “Hotelier of the World p10” with a photo of Chris Nassetta. Click on Nassetta’s photo.

• That will take you to a page (shown above) with all the candidates’ photos. At the top right corner of that page is a box that says “VOTE!” Just below that, in very small print, is a link.

• Scroll over the link with your mouse and click, it will finally take you to a Survey Monkey page where you can actually vote.

• Mahalo! Thank you!