A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

Getting dirt under our fingernails to demonstrate Tourism’s benefits

By Dr. Richard Kelley

While the global Travel & Tourism industry is typically perceived positively, it is not always seen in a flattering light, particularly in political campaign season when some candidates are looking for a handy target. Very recently, my daughter Bitsy Kelley and I traveled to Europe to participate in an event designed to demonstrate that Travel & Tourism usually has a profoundly positive impact on the places it touches, on the people who live there, and on the local and global environment.

We flew to Spain to attend the World Travel & Tourism Council’s Global Tourism Summit 2015 in Madrid. The day before the WTTC meetings began, more than a hundred global travel industry CEOs and other professionals gathered in El Retiro Park, a beautiful area in the heart of the city, to roll up our sleeves and pitch in on an unusual project.

WTTC Vice Chairman Brett Tollman, also president and CEO of The Travel Corporation (https://thetravelcorporation.com), had conceived the project, whose purpose was to demonstrate that the Travel & Tourism industry, symbolized by its top executives working together, can produce amazing results that benefit everyone. Tourism Cares (www.tourismcares.org), a U.S. nonprofit organization that helps the travel industry protect and restore valuable destinations, joined as a co-sponsor and was represented by CEO Mike Rea and Director of Events Jessica Ahern.

The challenge that day was to plant over 2,500 ivy plants along the Paseo del Marqués de Pontejos to enhance the landscape and improve the pedestrian experience for tourists and local residents. After the mayor of Madrid, Ana Botella, thanked us for our help, we broke up into groups, each of which chose one of the designated planting areas.

Our team was praised as “highly organized and efficient.” Bitsy laid out the location for the plants using a measuring stick and a sharp eye. Her dad and several
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It took a lot of organization, work and dedication on the part of The Travel Corporation, Tourism Cares and WTTC to bring together this many volunteers, supplies, plants, tools, etc. We were even provided with a box lunch, which we enjoyed at noon in a shady spot in the park.

As we ate our lunch, Bitsy and I chatted about how Outrigger Resorts has a similar approach to giving back to our communities. Scan the pages of any issue of Saturday Briefing and you will almost always see a story and photos of members of our ‘ohana doing something to improve the lives of the people and infrastructure of the areas in which our resorts are located.

That afternoon, our group got back to work at Barrio de Las Letras, one of the most photographed attractions in the city, where quotations from literary masters like Cervantes – the 16th-century author of Don Quixote – are embedded in the paving. Our challenge was to clean and repair the bronze inscriptions, which had been worn by heavy foot traffic.

That evening the WTTC members and their guests enjoyed a magnificent dinner in the Casino de Madrid, a spectacular palace designed to host exclusive galas in its royal ballrooms. Spain’s King Felipe VI joined the attendees, answering questions and posing for informal photographs.

Congratulations and thanks to Brett Tollman, Mike Rea, Jessica Ahern and many others for organizing a special day that did much to demonstrate the benefits that Travel & Tourism brings to the areas it serves.