Hawaii Resident Survey
Information We Need to Understand

During the past few weeks, there has been a significant amount of media coverage on the results of the Hawaii Tourism Authority’s “2005 Survey of Resident Sentiments on Tourism in Hawaii.” The survey is important in many ways, not the least of which is that, because the same company, John M. Knox & Associates Inc., has supervised the project in a generally consistent manner for four years and, by adding data from somewhat similar surveys from 1988 and 1993, long-term trends can be detected and analyzed.

The good news is that when asked if “Overall, tourism has brought more benefits than problems to this island,” 71 percent—or nearly three-quarters of the 1,352 residents surveyed—agreed that it has. That has been the general result of the six surveys done since 1988. It is a wonderful endorsement, and most politicians would give a great deal to achieve such consistently high approval ratings over a 17-year period.

When asked if “Tourism has been mostly good for you and your family,” the percentage of residents who agree with that statement has dropped from 60 percent in 1988 to 42 percent at the end of 2005. It is not that people are saying that tourism has been “bad” for themselves and their families—only six percent said that. The decline in “good” is a result of more people reporting “some good and some bad.” Something is going on, and we need to understand what.

The really puzzling results of the survey are in the area of employment:

- Only 37 percent felt that tourism jobs pay well
- 51 percent felt there was “little opportunity to advance”
- 43 percent felt the “best jobs [in tourism] are for outsiders”

That flies in the face of our own experience, as well as data gathered by the Hawaii Hotel & Lodging Association (HH&LA), which reported the average annual wage for a Hawaii hotel industry worker was $33,500 in 2004, among the highest in the nation.

Without doubt, there is a wealth of opportunity for Hawaii residents to hold and advance in a wide variety of challenging, well-paying jobs in Travel & Tourism. To prove that point, Patty Foley in Human Resources did a quick poll of managers and supervisors working for an Outrigger or OHANA hotel in Hawaii, many of whom are pictured with this article. A full 76 percent—more than three out of four—were either born in Hawaii or have lived in Hawaii for at least 20 years! We find that the vast majority of our Hawaii managers and supervisors are true kama‘aina who are supporting their families and pursuing rewarding careers thanks to the local Travel & Tourism industry. That certainly would not be the case if tourism jobs did not pay well, if there was little opportunity to advance, and if the best jobs went to “outsiders.”

The HTA survey respondents also reported the feeling that the visitor industry does not take a leadership role in solving community problems. That perception certainly does not match the reality. The visitor industry has been very generous with the three “T’s” that community organizations need the most—Time, Talent, and Treasure (money)! For instance:

- There is no better example of contributing the three “T’s” than Outrigger’s Jean Rolles, who was just recognized as Woman Community Leader of the year by Pacific Business News.
- The backers of Kona’s Ironman Triathlon race recently gave $50,000 in support of the Daniel Robert Sayre Memorial Foundation to fund rescue and emergency equipment for the Hawaii County Fire Department. Additional Ironman gifts over the years now approach a total of $400,000, according to the organization’s Public Relations Director Blair LaHaye.
- Throughout this month and on all major islands, thousands of Travel & Tourism employees will participate in the annual Visitor Industry Charity Walk, which is expected to raise over $1 million for community organizations.

The list is endless and the constructive involvement of our company and our ‘ohana in community affairs is reported almost every week in Saturday Briefing.

Travel & Tourism in Hawaii may be receiving the blame for problems that are not directly or solely related to our business. We suspect that bashing tourism may be reflexive, and really more an indication of general dissatisfaction with conditions that have nothing to do with the visitor industry. In the survey, respondents expressed real frustration over several “big issues” affecting their lifestyle including:

- The high cost of housing
• Traffic congestion
• Crime
• Population growth
• The high cost of food and clothing

There are many causes for these “big issues,” and the path often leads right back to years of misguided government regulations and failure to do what’s needed for Hawaii’s infrastructure to keep pace with the growing needs of its citizens. The cause of such “big issues” is certainly not lack of money. As reported by Pacific Business News, Hawaii collects more taxes per capita than any other state except Vermont!

Unfortunately, to many people, perception is reality. What we should learn from the survey is that there is an important story that urgently needs to be told. The visitor industry has faced this gap between perception and reality before and, with a lot of hard work and good communication, the full story of the benefits of tourism can once again be brought forth.

In Hawaii, Travel & Tourism and the well-being of the community are closely linked. We will rise and fall together. Murray Towill, President of HH&LA, says, “We have a shared interest in protecting and enhancing what makes Hawaii unique, especially the beauty and openness of our environment and the good nature of our people.” I thoroughly agree. We all must work harder than ever to bring home the message that “In Hawaii, Tourism is Everybody’s Business.”