NAIOP Honors Mel Kaneshige with Lifetime Achievement Award
By David Carey

Last Friday evening, May 3, at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel (unfortunately too late to be reported in last week’s Saturday Briefing), the Hawaii chapter of NAIOP honored Mel Kaneshige with its Lifetime Achievement Award, Holo Pono. Family, friends and members of the Outrigger® ‘ohana were on hand to share in the celebration and congratulate Mel on his accomplishments over his more than 17 years with Outrigger Enterprises Group. NAIOP, the National Association of Industrial & Office Properties, is Hawai‘i’s leading association for the commercial real estate industry.

Mel has been a key player in Outrigger’s growth and the repositioning of our real estate portfolio—from 11 hotels and 3,100 rooms in Waikīkī in 1995 to 44 properties with nearly 11,000 rooms currently under management or development in Hawai‘i, Australia, Guam, Fiji, Bali, Thailand, Vietnam and Hainan Island, China.

When NAIOP asked Mel about the projects that meant most to him, he didn’t hesitate to respond that it was Waikiki Beach Walk® that stood out most of all because of the impact it has had not only on our company, but on Waikīkī as a whole. The $460 million, eight-acre project completely transformed and reinvigorated the Lewers-Kālia-Beach Walk area, turning it into a world-class destination, featuring name-brand hotels, an upscale vacation-ownership resort, top-notch restaurants, and an attractive array of shops. Yet it still looks, feels, smells, tastes and sounds like Hawai‘i.

Equally important, Waikiki Beach Walk served as the catalyst for a number of major projects by other developers that have brought new energy to the entire district.

When Mel joined us in 1995, Waikīkī was on a downward spiral both in performance and in physical plant. Mel’s research made it clear that the city’s inflexible zoning code was at the heart of the problem. Mel and his team therefore set out on what would be a difficult 10-year journey to have the code amended and made more investment-friendly. Their success made it possible for Waikīkī property owners to invest a total of over $3 billion in hotels and other properties throughout the area.

NAIOP cited Mel for his “patience, creativity and leadership” in working through the lengthy negotiation and approval process needed to transform the Waikiki Beach Walk project from dream to reality.

Waikiki Beach Walk is not the only feather in Mel’s cap, however. Thanks to his responsibility for overseeing Outrigger’s acquisition, development and management of real estate and of new hotel and condominium management contracts, he has played a central role in Outrigger’s expansion into the Asia-Pacific region. The strong growth in population and income there is at the root of Outrigger’s interest in the area. As Mel puts it, “we need to fish where the fish are” and introduce Outrigger and its distinctive brand of hospitality – Ho’okipa – to more of the world.

As a result, Mel is currently involved in planning for new Outrigger properties on Hainan Island and at Quy Nhon, Vietnam. Several other projects are also being explored, including Mauritius and warm weather beachfront resort locations on the U.S. mainland and the Caribbean.

I am delighted to have such a successful “fisherman” on the Outrigger team. As Mel continues to cast his line, please join me in congratulating him on this well-deserved honor and thanking him for his unflagging dedication, determination, vision and optimism.

Well done, Mel! 🐟

Mel with his family: Son Pace, wife Nancy and daughter Tate