Tourism Supports Our Community in Sometimes Unexpected Ways

By Dr. Chuck Kelley

Last week I had the pleasure of attending the annual Commencement and Scholarship Awards ceremony at the Hospitality & Tourism Department at Kapiolani Community College, one of the University of Hawaii system’s seven community colleges. I was proud to represent Outrigger Enterprises in presenting 11 highly-motivated students with scholarships named for my grandmother, Estelle Louise Kelley, one of the co-founders of Outrigger Hotels & Resorts. These awards go a long way toward helping these young adults achieve their dreams of rewarding careers in the hospitality industry.

Looking at our own company, I see that many of our managers and supervisors got their start in life with the outstanding programs offered by the University of Hawaii system, such as at Kapiolani Community College and the UH School of Travel Industry Management. Outrigger Enterprises and Kelley family members have long recognized the importance of these programs to the people of these Islands and, in line with our company values, have supported them financially.

Donations that start with the hospitality industry find their way into many unexpected parts of our community. For example, young people considering studying architecture at UH might think this path has little to do with Waikiki hotels. They might be surprised to find out that years ago, Roy Kelley teamed up with fellow architect Allen R. Johnson to fund an endowment at the UH School of Architecture that supports students who wish to study internationally.

Likewise, students looking at a potential career in computer technology might not imagine that their intended path has any connection with the hotel industry. They might never know that Roy and Estelle Kelley and Linda and Richard Kelley funded two different computer centers at Punahou School, which have helped make Punahou a national leader in computer learning at the pre-college level and ignite the computer imaginations of thousands and thousands of local students in public, as well as private schools over the years.

Many of those who have succeeded in the Hawaii hospitality industry have been extraordinarily generous in their gifts back to the community, often provided quietly and without fanfare. Let me give a few more examples, just from the Outrigger ‘ohana:

After the death of my mother Jane Zieber Kelley, my father Dr. Richard Kelley, created an endowment to give scholarships to young women who, like my mother, wanted to learn to fly and become pilots. Many women who now have a career in the skies might not see the connection between the hotel industry and their profession, but it’s there nonetheless.

Jean Rolles, Outrigger’s Vice President of Community Relations, has long been a tireless advocate for many of the charitable organizations that do vital work in our community. In addition to her generous personal donations, she devotes much of her time and boundless energy to the 19 nonprofit boards on which she currently sits, including Chaminade University’s Board of Regents.

Our CEO David Carey sits on Punahou’s board and has been working hard to improve public education in Hawaii through a committee of the Hawaii Business Roundtable.

Perry Sorenson, former Outrigger COO, and now a consultant to our company, has always been committed to education. He championed the Outrigger Ke ‘Ano Wa’a process that provided opportunities for our employees not only in Hawaii, but throughout the Pacific, to learn about the history and the culture of their islands and peoples. Perry and his wife Sally also established the Perry & Sally Sorenson Scholarship fund that provided scholarships for dependents of Outrigger employees.
Roy Kelley’s business partner, Guy Marshall, lived in the OHANA West Hotel up to his death. In his later years, I had the opportunity to get to know him well. I learned that he gave generously, and often anonymously, to local charities, such as the Waikiki Health Center. He left his estate to the Hawaii Community Foundation, which provides grants to hundreds of local nonprofit organizations every year.

Again, these are just a few of the examples, from just one company, of how businesses and individuals in the Hawaii hospitality industry quietly support the organizations that make good things happen in our community.

Here in Hawaii, we have our own special culture, and that includes a big dose of humility. It is not generally acceptable to “toot your own horn” or call attention to one’s self. But if we really want to get the message out that “Tourism Is Everyone’s Business,” then we need to clearly point out all the ways in which tourism supports our community. Philanthropy is certainly one of them. And support of education is another.

The Irish literary giant W.B. Yeats once wrote, “Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.”

For the 11 bright young students honored at Kapiolani Community College this week, I wish them well and hope that the flame of knowledge will burn brightly within them throughout their careers in Travel & Tourism.