This Month, Let’s Say Mahalo to our Troops

At a glance, they’re like everyone else – husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, nephews and nieces. They volunteer to coach kids’ sports, enjoy fishing, and hanging out with family and friends. But what separates these people from the rest of us are the lengths to which they go in order to protect their families, and their country.

That’s why Outrigger and OHANA Hotels & Resorts is proud to salute our brave troops serving at home and overseas as part of National Military Appreciation Month. Designated by Congress to “reconnect the Family of America,” National Military Appreciation Month honors not only those Americans who have given their lives in defense of our nation’s freedom, but veterans, retirees, reservists, and the men and women now serving on active duty, and their families, who join them in their sacrifices.

What, you might ask, do hotel people know about the military? Here at Outrigger and OHANA Hotels & Resorts, our relationship with the military goes a long way back, starting with my parents, Roy and Estelle Kelley, who ran apartments in Waikiki in the 1930s and 1940s. Many of their tenants and guests back then were in the military, and they often invited their military friends to Sunday breakfast at our home.

As reported in last week’s Saturday Briefing, Waikiki was one of the major R&R areas for those serving in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. Husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, parents and their sons and daughters would all meet in Waikiki for a few precious days. Our hotel managers knew Roy and Estelle would never turn down military families that wanted to spend their R&R in Waikiki – and sometimes they even had to disappoint a few leisure visitors in order to make room.

Today, we are proud to continue to honor and support the men and women in uniform who are part of our Outrigger ‘ohana, including:

- Corporate Sales Secretary Tania Morrill’s husband, Sergeant Major T. Lanky Morrill of “Konohiki” – the Task Force formed by the 29th Brigade Combat Team that is living and working alongside the Iraqi army’s 210th Battalion, preparing it to take over the security of their own country.
- Sales Secretary Ricol Akana-Phillips’ brother, Specialist Richard “Ricky Boy” Akana Jr., who is serving with the 29th Support Battalion, B Company, of the Hawai‘i Army National Guard and is quick to share all his care packages with other soldiers.
- Administrative Assistant Lehua Kala‘i’s nephew James “Kalima” Adams – an Army Staff Sergeant who is serving his third tour in the Middle East as a Green Beret and is currently involved in the training and deployment of Iraqi commando units in various locations throughout Iraq.
- Specialist Shaun Matsuura, brother of the Groups Department’s Jodi Ching. Stationed at Camp Victory in Baghdad, he expressed deep appreciation for the support of everyone at Outrigger when Jodi told him about the theme of this year’s Visitor Industry Charity Walk and the Outrigger Checkpoint.

It is hard to imagine what our country would be like without the dedicated men and women of our Armed Forces. Theirs is a 24/7 job that – while filled with great satisfaction – is also filled with great challenges, trials, and sacrifices.

I invite you to show your support of our troops by joining the thousands of Outrigger
employees and other visitor industry personnel across the state, as they hit the streets on May 21 for the annual Visitor Industry Charity Walk. Sponsored by the Hawaii Hotel & Lodging Association, the Charity Walk is Hawaii’s largest single-day fund-raiser, taking place simultaneously on Oahu, Maui, Kauai, and the Big Island.

Last year, more than 11,009 walkers on the four islands participated to raise $960,400 for more than 170 local charities. This year, the bar has been raised, and the industry hopes to raise $1 million, with all money allocated locally toward social and community needs, as well as to organizations assisting the military and their families.

At the Outrigger-sponsored checkpoint in Waikiki, tables will be set up where walkers may fill out postcards with words of encouragement and appreciation to our troops. Outrigger will then take those notes and mail them to family members of Outrigger employees who are deployed overseas, so they can share them with their fellow servicemen and -women. So if you haven’t done so already, I encourage all of our Hawaii ‘ohana to sign up and participate in this year’s Visitor Industry Charity Walk.

After the Charity Walk, head over to Wheeler Army Airfield, where Outrigger is joining other Hawaii companies in sponsoring Sunset in the Park. This celebration will be a special “welcome home” for the more than 10,000 soldiers of the 25th Infantry Division (Light), the Hawaii Army National Guard, and the U.S. Army Reserve who have served our nation with distinction in Iraq and Afghanistan during the previous year.

Sunset in the Park is being held both Saturday and Sunday, May 21 and 22, beginning at noon. While enjoying the food, music, entertainment, and rides, make sure you talk to the military people there, and when you come across a soldier, sailor, Marine or airman or -woman who has served overseas, shake his or her hand and say “mahalo” from all of us at Outrigger and OHANA Hotels & Resorts.