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

Estelle Louise Kelley Scholarships help KCC students pursue dreams
By Dr. Chuck Kelley and Dr. Richard Kelley

The Kapiʻolani Community College (KCC) Hospitality & Tourism Education Department held its 10th Annual Scholarships and Awards Banquet last week and, as is usually the case, the highlight of the event was the presentation of scholarships for the upcoming school year.

As an industry leader and a strong supporter of the University of Hawaiʻi System, Outrigger Resorts and the Kelley family created the Estelle Louise Kelley Scholarship program in 1989 to benefit students enrolled in either KCC’s Hotel Operations Program or its Pre-Business Transfer Program.

This year, eight deserving students majoring in hospitality won Estelle Louise Kelley Scholarships. We are especially pleased to report that one of them, Denise Torres, is a member of the Outrigger ‘ohana. Currently at the front desk of OHANA Waikīkī East, Denise has faced many challenges balancing full-time employment, pursuing her education and raising a family. The Estelle Louise Kelley Scholarship will help Denise and her family as she returns to school to further build her knowledge and skills.

The occasion also gives us an appropriate moment to honor Estelle Louise Kelley and the critical role she played in developing the company now known as Outrigger Resorts. Her husband, Roy C. Kelley, usually gets most of the credit for founding our company in the difficult, post-World War II days of 1947, but the truth is that Estelle Kelley played an equally vital role, and we believe her influence is still felt in the DNA of every part of our company.

Like Roy, Estelle came from humble beginnings. She was raised in the Los Angeles area and demonstrated a great deal of spark and drive even in her high school days. To go to college in the early 1920s, she would boldly drive across rough fields and poorly maintained roads to get to a recently established branch of the University of California a number of miles west of her home. That institution is now called UCLA.

When she and Roy came to Hawai‘i in 1929, Estelle landed a job as legal secretary to Judge James Coke. This provided household funds while Roy pursued his architectural career. Later, as she and Roy began to rent out apartments near their home in Waikīkī, she interviewed prospective tenants, kept the books, and cooked and served lunches to the workmen building new apartments that Roy had designed. She raised three children and, in 1942, was a single parent in Los Angeles.
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for some time after she and the children were evacuated to the U.S. mainland following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Women and children were given priority, and Roy stayed behind.

After World War II, Estelle took on more and more responsibilities in running the fledgling family-owned and operated hotel company. As Outrigger’s original reservationist (for whom our first computerized reservations system, Stellex, was later named), she confirmed bookings by typing out personal letters to all prospective guests on a manual typewriter, then pasting on a three-cent stamp. Estelle was the gentle but firm person who handled difficult guests and occasional employment issues. Then she would come home and make dinner for the family, including a delicious dessert.

Those were the days when opportunities for women were limited. But it never occurred to Estelle that she could not do anything she wanted “just because she was a girl.” Roy and Estelle were a great team and, we can tell you that Roy would never have enjoyed the success he did without her.

Estelle’s character, strength, leadership and determination are remembered today in many ways, and we are pleased and proud to know that includes the scholarships for deserving students at KCC.