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

Dr. Jim Barahal honored
By Dr. Richard Kelley

Over my lifetime I have met, been friends with, and worked with many wonderful people, from family members and friends to teachers and service providers. One of those whom I have always admired greatly is Dr. Jim Barahal, so I was delighted to hear that on May 5 he was inducted into the Hawai’i Sports Hall of Fame in recognition of his 27 years of outstanding work and success leading the Honolulu Marathon Association.

The honor is hugely deserved because Dr. Jim, more than any other individual, has grown the race from a struggling local competition into one of the world’s top athletic events, comparable to marathons run in Boston, New York, London, Paris and many other cities far larger than Honolulu. Outrigger Resorts is proud to have been a consistent race sponsor and to have provided other special assistance needed to help the race and its organization grow, as author Jim Collins might say, “From Good to Great!”

After returning from a brief honeymoon, she and I worked together in a room behind the front desk in the Outrigger Waikiki Hotel, along with a reservations staff of about a dozen.

Just next door, down in the bowels of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, a fellow physician, Dr. Garton Evans Wall, had a clinic where he took care of ailing tourists and Waikiki workers.

I knew Dr. Wall well and had once had an important encounter with him – he was the attending physician at my birth on December 28, 1933, at Kapi’olani Maternity Hospital, a few miles away in Mānoa Valley!

In 1933, Hawai’i was still very much a plantation economy that depended on laborers who had been brought here from all over the Pacific area and beyond. Plantation employees, whose wages were not terribly generous in those days, were therefore also provided many free or low-cost benefits including housing in plantation “camps” and shopping for essentials at plantation stores where they could buy yards of inexpensive palaka, a tough, checkered denim cloth used to make clothing. Free health care was provided at plantation clinics staffed with nurses and physicians on a salary paid by the plantation companies.

Dr. Wall, born in the Territory of Hawai’i in 1906, was one of those plantation physicians during the week, and he often supplemented his salary by filling in for doctors in Honolulu on his days off from the planation clinic. Thus, a young Dr. Wall was there at Kapi’olani Hospital to deliver me when Estelle Kelley went into labor. Eventually Dr. Wall’s “moonlighting” in Honolulu grew into the full-time practice he conducted at the Royal Hawaiian.

In 1981, Dr. Wall was 76 years old and thinking about retiring or at least cutting back on his workload by getting

I would like to add some personal notes about Jim, so readers can understand how a young physician from Michigan could have become so successful as president and CEO of an organization that runs a premier international marathon and a number of related events.

I first met Jim in the early 1980s, probably not long after he came to Hawai’i. It was only a few years after I had married former Punahou teacher Linda Van Gilder Arrington.
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Dr. Jim Barahal, Dr. Chuck Kelley and Helena Barahal

In 1984, 11 years after it was born (with a grand total of 167 runners in the first race) Jim was invited to join the Honolulu Marathon Association. His primary responsibility was handling arrangements for the “elite runners,” top performers on the international marathon circuit, only a few of whom then troubled to compete in Honolulu. This was a time when marathons around the world were changing,

giving more emphasis to participation by elite runners and to finding corporate sponsors.

By 1987, Jim had vaulted into the presidency of the association, and one of his first acts was to go to Japan where he quickly discovered serious interest on the part of JAL. The rest is history. In 1987, Jim’s first year as president, growth jumped in a single year from 6,000 entrants to just over 10,000. By 1992 it had mushroomed to 30,000.

Jim felt that for continued growth the event needed something more than just the 26.2-mile (42.195-km) race. The late Pacific Business News writer John McDermott credited Jim with adding prize money. Modest at first, the prizes today total over $150,000 divided among several entrant categories.

Then Jim added a 10-kilometer walk for people who wanted to enjoy the Marathon’s atmosphere at a more relaxed pace. Later, a pre-race “carb-loading” lū‘au was added. It is now a magnet for thousands.

When Jim later told me he wanted to upgrade the Honolulu Marathon Expo, we pulled out a pad of paper and together designed a special canvas roof to cover the circular outdoor area next to the meeting rooms at the Outrigger Reef Hotel. A lot of T-shirts, fanny packs, logo hats, logo wrist watches and other paraphernalia were sold there until the Honolulu Convention Center was finally completed and could provide adequate space – as it continues to do today – for registration desks and hordes of vendors, runners and their families pawing over thousands of retail items.

The addition of major sponsorships by well-known Japanese companies such as Japan Airlines, MUFG Financial Group, NTT Docomo and Sato Pharmaceuticals USA has brought a tremendous number of entries from Japan.

another physician to help him. He probably thought the heavens had answered his prayers when young James Barahal, M.D., walked into his Royal Hawaiian clinic to say that he had just started a service to see patients in their hotel rooms. Jim’s company was appropriately named “Doctors On Call.”

After Dr. Wall checked Jim’s excellent references, he asked Jim to help with house calls. The service provided by Doctors On Call was well received. Jim bought a Moped™ and would quickly scoot through Waikīkī’s traffic and arrive at a patient’s hotel room much sooner than expected. Business boomed. At one point, Jim recalls, he was doing over 25 daily house calls in Waikīkī and all over the island.

A few years later, Jim became quite concerned when Dr. Wall announced he was about to retire and the hotel managers said they needed the clinic space for other purposes.

Dr. Wall asked Jim if he’d ever met me. Hearing that he had not, Dr. Wall suggested that Jim just walk next door and introduce himself. He did and encountered me at work in the reservations room behind the front desk.

When Jim sought my advice about the loss of Dr. Wall’s office, I told him I could possibly squeeze enough room for a receptionist, nurse and physician plus a couple of examining rooms in a storage area next to the space used for our growing reservations and fledgling computer staff and near the back door to the Main Showroom. I also warned him that at night, when the Society of Seven performed, it became rather noisy in that area. We agreed on a modest rent and the offices of Doctors on Call opened in the Outrigger Waikīkī a few months later.

Business at Doctors On Call started slowly, but Jim quickly demonstrated that he had good instincts for advertising, marketing and service. He advertised and made sure his staff performed efficiently and courteously. Drivers and physician’s assistants in minivans replaced the Moped™.

Knowledge of medicine and an entrepreneurial instinct were not the only qualities Jim brought with him to Hawai‘i. While both an undergraduate and later a medical student at the University of Michigan, he had been a competitive runner. He soon began competing in the then-still-young Honolulu Marathon.

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is not uncommon for runners from Japan to represent as much as 60 to 65 percent of Marathon entries.

Jim’s 2012 addition of the Hapalua, Hawaii’s Half-Marathon, which now takes place every April, has attracted even more runners – nearly 7,000 participated in this year’s Hapalua, three times the number who ran when it began four years ago. And satellite events in Afghanistan and Iraq proved to be wonderful morale boosters for members of the U.S. armed forces deployed there.

Throughout all of his involvement with the Honolulu Marathon, Dr. Barahal has continued practicing medicine almost daily through Doctors on Call, which is now part of the Straub Clinic. He has also been an attentive, loving husband of his spouse, Helena, and an actively involved father and mentor for their three teen-aged children, Zach, Olivia and Sebastian.

I am also proud to add that, for me and every member of my family, he has always been a great and inspiring personal friend. In fact, Jim recently reminded me of the lunches he used to have with my parents, Roy and Estelle Kelley, when he would give Roy a weekly injection prescribed by Roy’s personal physician. As he prepared the needle and syringe, my dad would always say “Shoot me the sherbet, Herbert” and then break into the USC fight song:*

“Fight on for old SC,
the coach he needs
his salary!”

Congratulations on your induction into the Hawai’i Sports Hall of Fame, Dr. Jim. Mahalo and God Bless!

*USC, the University of Southern California, is where Roy Kelley earned his degree in architecture.