APEC is Huge and Coming to Hawai‘i Soon

By Dr. Richard Kelley

It hardly seems possible that a year and a half has already gone by since Hawai‘i won the bid to host the 2011 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Now, the meetings, scheduled for the first two weeks of November in Honolulu, are only about 160 days away.

APEC brings together the leaders of 21 Asia-Pacific economies every year to discuss the status and future potential for trade and investments all around the Pacific Rim. Generally, the heads of state or government from all the countries linked by the Pacific in North and South America, Asia, and Oceania attend, as well as key cabinet ministers and other top officials, including America's Hawai‘i-born president, Barack Obama.

APEC's members are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam. In the coming weeks, Saturday Briefing will focus on these exciting areas, which have shifted the economic center of the world to the Pacific Basin.

It is hard to overstate the importance of the APEC gathering for Hawai‘i. Our state's foremost meetings and conventions expert, Pris Texeira, puts it this way: "In the world of meetings and conventions, APEC is the equivalent of the Olympics for the meetings industry."

A successful APEC meeting will firmly establish Hawai‘i as an excellent venue for major meetings of all types for years to come. Making it the success we need will require an unprecedented level of dedication and cooperation between all branches of local, state and federal government, as well as labor, business and the people of the entire state.

Hospitality, security and efficiency will all be of critical importance!

Many will recall the riots that broke out in Seattle during the World Trade Organization’s Ministerial Conference in November 1999. There were even some peaceful protests staged in Hawai‘i during the Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank held at the Hawaii Convention Center in May 2001.

It is going to take a lot of commitment from everyone – a positive attitude, a passion, and a belief that we can join together to upgrade our tourism infrastructure and all relevant training during this era of economic challenges.

I saw this happen in Denver three years ago when it seemed as though practically everyone in the city worked around the clock to help host the Democratic National Convention (DNC), where Barack Obama was nominated as candidate for president.

The DNC was actually a much larger event than APEC. Tens of thousands of delegates, media representatives and politicians had to be fed, housed and moved around the metropolitan area. The potential for massive protests, riots or terrorist activities was enormous. But thanks to good planning and nearly flawless execution, there were only a few minor hitches, and from my point of view, and that of almost everyone I spoke with, including many Hawai‘i delegates, everything went extremely well. The reputation of Denver as a place that can handle a major meeting is, like the city itself, a mile high.

I have been told that when APEC was held in Singapore in 2009, everything also ran with “clockwork precision.”

A great deal of work has been done since Hawai‘i was named the site for the 2011 meetings. Gregg Yamanaka, husband of Outrigger’s Senior VP, Human Resources & Planning, Ruthann Yamanaka, is the President and CEO of the APEC 2011 Hawai‘i Host Committee.

Outrigger is directly involved in a big way. Our President and CEO, David Carey, is an active member of the Host Committee. Our Senior Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer, Rob Solomon, is a member of the Marketing, Communications and Outreach Subcommittee. Gregg Yamanaka tells me that ‘ohana members Pila Hanson and Kaipo Ho “have put a lot of time into developing a meaningful hospitality training program that will benefit our entire community. They are taking Outrigger's brand of ho'okipa (hospitality) out to the industry so that hopefully someday everyone who plays a role in our visitors’ experience will emulate Outrigger’s model.”

In addition, Outrigger has made a significant contribution to the $3.5 million Host Committee Fund

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needed for various programs, including:

• Training of volunteers and key industry partners
• Community outreach programs
• Informational displays, websites, collateral, signage
• Marketing of Hawai‘i as a business destination
• Hospitality – receptions and amenities, volunteer uniforms, lei and entertainment
• Business workshops
• Transportation and logistics

Finally, we are upgrading Internet bandwidth at several of our properties to handle the unprecedented communications needs of many of our international guests.

Many volunteers are needed. Visit www.apec2011hawaii.com and find out how you can get involved.

I believe APEC Hawai‘i 2011 is the stroke of luck that Hawai‘i’s economy so desperately needs. This is our big chance not only to show that our island state is a great place to relax and enjoy beautiful weather, a sparkling ocean and many unique multicultural experiences, but also to prove conclusively that Hawai‘i is a place where those great assets are not distractions but catalysts that actually promote and enhance serious business get-togethers, high-level meetings and a groundbreaking, world-changing exchange of ideas.

Imua, Hawai‘i–Let’s make APEC Hawai‘i 2011 No Ka Oi! 🌺