Tragedy in Australia

Every member of our ‘ohana connected with Outrigger’s development and operations in Australia was shocked and deeply saddened this past week when we learned of the tragic death of our partners, Brian and Katherine Ray, in a plane crash in the Victorian Alps.

Late Friday afternoon, July 8, the couple was flying in a chartered eight-seat Piper Chieftain on approach to Mount Hotham airfield, about 370 km (230 miles) northeast of Melbourne, when they encountered severe winter weather. According to news reports, the aircraft disappeared from the radar screen. After three days of frantic searching, it was found in mountainous, rugged terrain. The plane had crashed into the side of a hill in a heavily wooded area. Neither the Rays nor their pilot Russell Lee survived.

The Rays operated as a team, much like Outrigger Hotels’ founders Roy and Estelle Kelley. Brian was the developer and builder who seemingly always had a project under construction, with several more on the drawing boards. Kathy acted as the interior designer for the hotels and condominiums they built. Together they developed four of the projects Outrigger now operates in Queensland—Cairns Resort by Outrigger, Outrigger Coolangatta Beach Resort, Outrigger on the Inlet Port Douglas, and the just-opened Outrigger on the Beach at SALT.

Everyone who came in contact with Brian and Kathy was impressed with their enthusiasm, energy, and friendliness. Brian loved to talk about the structural attributes of a building under construction. Kathy was equally passionate about the details of the furniture, wall coverings, and carpets. Away from work, they were very active and enjoyed a wide variety of sports, including scuba diving, skiing, and boating. They had a wonderful relationship with their three children, Jack, Savannah, and Tom.

Brian, particularly, had a great sense of humor. Outrigger’s Managing Director for Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji, Dave Lawrence, recalls a typical example. He and Brian were talking about exercising, and Dave mentioned that he was going to the health club at the Marriott. Brian looked at Dave’s waistline and remarked, “If I were the manager at the Marriott, I’d pay you not to tell anyone that!”

Although found on the list of Australia’s wealthiest 200, Brian and Kathy were down-to-earth, hard-working, wonderful people. For example, I was assisting Brian in the sunrise shooting of a commercial in front of Outrigger on the Beach at SALT. Two young children were part of the commercial and the morning air was a little cool. Brian took special care to see that the children were wrapped in large towels and felt secure, as cameras were shifted and repositioned between takes.

Another time, I recall being with Brian, 64, at the public bar that is a concession in Outrigger on the Inlet Port Douglas. Two scruffy characters at the end of the bar were enjoying a mid-day pint, when Brian struck up a conversation. It was not long before we found out the two were commercial shark hunters, and soon we were all engaged in an animated conversation about their profession.

Brian and Kathy’s company, the Ray Group, has some A$2 billion (US$1.5 billion) worth of projects on its books, including the renovation of the Sheraton Mirage resorts on Queensland’s Gold Coast and Port Douglas, and the redevelopment of the Mount Hotham ski resort near where their plane crashed. The Ray Group’s top executives hope to be able move forward and realize the dreams and visions of Brian and Kathy Ray. We at Outrigger will do everything we can to help make it happen.
On July 12, the Outrigger ‘ohana gathered to bid aloha to Yu Li who retired after 16 years of dedicated service. Perry Sorenson, Barry Wallace, Kimberly Agas, and Jim Heather expressed their appreciation on behalf of Outrigger Hotels & Resorts for her hard work and commitment, and presented her with gifts of aloha and recognition.

A dedicated and loyal employee, Yu will be missed by the Outrigger ‘ohana. Yu is grateful to Outrigger and the Kelley family for being such a good employer and for taking such good care of her—like she was part of the family. She cherishes the friendships she has made over the years and wishes everyone good luck and health.

During her retirement, Yu and her husband Sek Lim Lam, who also works for Outrigger, plan to move to San Diego to join their two sons and their families. Being a grandmother of two, Yu is looking forward to taking on her new job—full-time babysitter. When time allows, she also plans to travel with her husband.

Outrigger Hotels & Resorts is proud of Yu and her years of dedication and service, and we wish her the very best retirement. Mahalo and a hui hou!