On The Road Again
By Dr. Richard Kelley

For the past two weeks, my wife Linda and I have been on a road trip, covering over 2,500 miles while driving between Colorado and Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada, and back. The journey brought me in contact with some of the many facets of the Travel & Tourism industry and reminded me once again of the great impact it has on our nation’s economy.

Our accommodations along the way have ranged from roadside motels that would barely earn one star in most travel rating systems to iconic properties such as the grand and historic Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel.

Almost everywhere we stopped we found people dedicated to their jobs and providing hospitality services in the finest tradition of our industry. A large number of the workers we met were in their twenties. Many appeared to be college students or recent graduates working during the peak summer travel season to earn tuition and gain job experience.

A typical example was a young man named Justin Call who was on duty at the Hilton Garden Inn Kalispell, Montana, when we arrived in the lobby about 5 p.m. We told Justin that we had a reservation but he could not find our names on the list of arrivals. After a bit of searching, he discovered that our travel agent had made an error when she entered our reservation request and had booked us for a month later. That put us in a very difficult situation because the town was sold out, if not oversold. The phones were ringing and other travelers were coming into the lobby seeking a room – any room – for the night.

Justin calmly handled the situation with a sense of professionalism that I rarely see in someone his age. While attending to other customers and often juggling two telephone receivers with his hands, he helped us locate a vacant room for the night.

Justin, whose home is in Bigfork, Montana – population 1,563 – followed up the next day with an email to make sure we had been taken care of and offered his contact details in case we needed assistance while he was not on duty back at the Hilton Garden Inn.

I replied by email, thanked him for his thoughtfulness and asked if he was considering a career in the hospitality industry.

Justin wrote back saying, “I certainly plan on staying with the hospitality industry. Ever since I was a small child in kindergarten, my one and only goal has been to own a boutique hotel someday. I have been in the hospitality industry for over six years now and have completed my associate’s degree in hospitality management as well. I am looking forward to continuously learning more and more about the industry and finding my niche.”

Based on what I observed, I am sure Justin will achieve his goals as will, no doubt, some of the other fine young men and women we met on our road trip these past couple of weeks. They are bright, enthusiastic and willing to work hard for success.

Contrary to what some national politicians have recently been saying, this generation of future leaders, like our company founders Roy and Estelle Kelley and countless others, will typically achieve success thanks to their own individual efforts and initiative, by taking personal risks and working late at night, through weekends and holidays. They will attain their goals by persistently looking for opportunities to get more business, by making operations more efficient and by selecting the best co-workers.

Along the way, they will also pay a very substantial amount of taxes, at the local and federal levels, probably far more than other, less motivated and less productive individuals.

And, finally, if we do not burden them with too many government rules, regulations and penalties, they will create job and growth opportunities for many, many others.

I wish Justin and everyone like him good luck and all of the success possible in our fascinating, dynamic industry and throughout our great country.