Our 'ohana has been greatly saddened by the passing of one of its most deeply loved and respected members, Tony Del Piano, on Monday, August 4. Tony was a legend – a general manager at many of our Waikiki properties who, for nearly 60 years, exemplified the meaning of true hospitality.

Tony was born in Bristol, Rhode Island, 95 years ago. He was one of seven surviving children of Italian immigrants who struggled to put food on the table each day. In a 2012 interview with Allison Schaefer of the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, Tony said, “I got off at the ninth grade and went to work at a jewelry factory. We were too poor for me to stay in school.” Three days after Imperial Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the Navy and was sent to the Mediterranean on a destroyer.

After the war ended, Tony secured a job in the legendary Boca Raton Hotel, in the heart of Florida’s Gold Coast, in the south of Palm Beach County. He soon met a young lady named Barbara Dorsam who was working in one of the hotel’s shops and had family ties to Honolulu. They married and had the first of their three children while living there.

In 1957, the young couple moved to Hawai‘i where Tony got a job as a cashier at the Edgewater Hotel, which had opened just a few years earlier. Little did he know that would be the start of a career with Outrigger Hotels & Resorts and its founders, Roy and Estelle Kelley, that would continue for six decades.

I vividly remember watching Tony in action at the front desk of both the Outrigger Waikiki on the Beach (OWK) and Outrigger Reef on the Beach. He greeted every arriving guest with genuine sincerity and personally took phone reservations from people who wanted to book a return vacation. People from all over the world called to talk directly with Tony. He had a knack for making friends in an instant, and literally every guest in the hotel felt they were receiving special treatment from the hotel manager. And they really were.

Tony ran a tight ship and kept everything up to a high standard at all times. That was in an era I sometimes today call “B.C.” – Before Computers and Before Cell Phones! Reservations were handled only by mail or telephone. Before the arrival of Wide Area Telephone Service (WATS) in Hawai‘i, Outrigger maintained an office in California to process reservation requests and confirmations. The data was relayed to Honolulu by Teletype or courier.

Every morning, when Tony arrived at the front desk, he was handed the “traffic sheet,” a piece of stiff paper about the size of a tabloid newspaper, covered with bits of data about the day’s arrivals – number of rooms, departure dates, room type, etc. While standing at the front desk and chatting with guests, Tony would match available rooms with incoming guests and jot room numbers onto the traffic sheet. He used a pencil, as there would be lots of changes as the day wore on.

All through his shift, six days a week, for many, many years, Tony maintained his cool and sense of humor.
no matter what happened. He also consistently filled all the rooms in his hotel. His goal was 100-percent occupancy every day, every month, every year!

After retiring, Tony kept active and healthy by taking long daily walks. I often saw him on Diamond Head Road during my visits to O‘ahu and had several occasions to sit down and chat about our years together. They went by so fast.

Tony became an Ambassador of Aloha and was always a staunch supporter of Outrigger. Every Friday, until just recently, you would find him in the lobby of the Outrigger Waikiki chatting with hotel guests and sharing wonderful stories about the old days in Waikiki. He embodied what hospitality is all about: welcoming guests and making them feel special.

“He was a wonderful ambassador for our company,” said Robert McConnell, current general manager at Outrigger Waikiki On The Beach. “A lot of our returnees came to know him by name, and they looked forward to coming back and catching up.”

Longtime bellman Stan Daguay also appreciated his visits. “He remembered names that I don’t even remember,” said Daguay. “Although retired, he acted like he did when he was working. He was amazing.”

Our sincere condolences and best wishes to Tony’s wife Barbara and the Del Piano family.

Thank you, Tony, for your years of loyalty and unflagging support of the Kelley family, Outrigger and the Waikiki visitor industry. We miss you so much. A hui hou – until we meet again.

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A service and celebration of Tony Del Piano’s life will be held at the Outrigger Canoe Club this Monday, August 18, at 8 a.m. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Hospice Hawaii of St. Augustine’s by the Sea.