Duke's OceanFest 2016: Waikiki's premier ocean sports festival

By Dr. Chuck Kelley

For much of the past two weeks, Outrigger was again proud to be a lead sponsor of Duke's OceanFest, held every August in honor of the legendary Duke Paoa Kahanamoku, the greatest waterman who ever lived.

Duke's OceanFest was born on August 24, 2002, on Duke's 112th birthday, as a simple one-day event to celebrate the U.S. Postal Service's issuance of a commemorative stamp honoring him. Over the years it has blossomed into a nine-day festival where Waikiki's beaches and waters are the center of the action as hundreds of kama'āina and malihini (visitors) gather to participate in the activities – or to watch.

Today there are more than 20 ocean and beach competitions and events honoring Duke's memory, spirit and legacy. They include surfing competitions for teens, amateurs, pros, tandems, the physically challenged, and four-legged (mostly canine) competitors; a Wounded Warrior canoe regatta; stand-up paddling; lie-down surfboard racing; a one-mile ocean swim; surfboard waterpolo; beach volleyball; a movie and live Hawaiian music on Waikiki Beach; a beachfront lūʻau; and a commemorative lei draping of Duke Kahanamoku's statue – larger than life, as was the man it honors.

Renowned as Hawaii'i's greatest athlete, Duke Kahanamoku won five Olympic swimming medals in the games of 1912, 1920 and 1924 (the 1916 games were a casualty of World War I), including three golds. He is also recognized as the “Father of International Surfing.” In his prime, he was the world's fastest swimmer, the single most influential person in promoting surfing worldwide, and a champion canoe paddler and steersman.

Later in life, Duke was revered worldwide as Hawaii'i's “Ambassador of Aloha,” with his belief in the importance of the aloha spirit, captured in his own words, which are now known as Duke's Creed:

In Hawaii'i we greet friends, loved ones and strangers with Aloha, which means with love. Aloha is the key word to the universal spirit of real hospitality, which makes Hawaii renowned as the world's center of understanding and fellowship. Try meeting or leaving people with Aloha. You'll be surprised by their reaction. I believe it and it is my creed. Aloha to you.

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Duke's legacy and aloha spirit embody the essence of gracious hospitality, which is so central to our Island culture and visitor industry.

I recall as a young child occasionally seeing Duke driving around Waikīkī in a stately white automobile. Each time we spotted his car, my father, Dr. Richard Kelley, would light up and respectfully tell me, “There goes a Duke. He is a very special man.” I will never forget the sight of him with his white hair, white jacket and striking red carnation lei.

My father admired Duke’s integrity and recalled the time he was competing in the Hawai‘i International Billfish Tournament in Kailua-Kona on the Big Island. Duke had a rather large marlin on his line, but his pole broke. He felt that pulling the fish in by hand without the pole would not be honest competition, so he forfeited the fish and the competition.

Even further back, Duke had a friendship with my grandfather, Roy Kelley, who built the Outrigger Waikīkī where the old Outrigger Canoe Club once stood. While the hotel was under construction, Roy would often see Duke paddling his canoe, swimming or surfing offshore. One day Duke came up and asked if he could continue to keep his surfboard and canoe on the site until the construction of the new hotel required all the space. Roy immediately agreed, and for the next several years they saw each other often.

Mahalo to all the Outrigger hosts who participated in making this year’s Duke’s OceanFest the best ever. The generous hospitality you demonstrate every day perpetuates the wonderful legacy left to us by this extraordinary son of Hawai‘i, Duke Kahanamoku.
Top left: Herman Lam and CJ Sword drape Duke with lei
Top right: Kathy and David Carey, Bitsy Kelley and Jenny and Dr. Chuck Kelley with Olympians: Keala O’Sullivan, Kathy Hammond, Mike Rothwell, Chris Woo and Sonny Tanabe
Above: Hau‘oli Lā Hānau (Happy Birthday) to the legendary Duke Kahanamoku
Left: #teamOutrigger supports at the Aloha Reception: Thaila Kaikana, Kathy Hansberry, Kimo Miguel, Lorry Ijima-Sato, Lauren Haavik and Sheila Bernardo
Legends Surf Classic Outrigger Wāhine (Women's) Team: Jane Schumacker, Bitsy Kelley, Jerico Popular, Banzai Betty, Nani Naish and Kally Smitson

Luana Maitland with her uncle Gary Makalena, one of the original Waikīkī Beachboys

Legends Surf Classic Outrigger Wāhine (Women's) Team: Jane Schumacker, Bitsy Kelley, Jerico Popular, Banzai Betty, Nani Naish and Kally Smitson

#teamOutrigger volunteers: Kathy Hansberry, Lorry Ijima-Sato, Scott Sato, Charlene Goo, Ian Umetsu and Ashelly Ijima

Legends Surf Classic The Outrigger Kāne (Men's) Team: Paul Strauch, Josh Kronfeld, Leighton Lam, Dr. Chuck Kelley, John Morgan and Kimo Miguel

Dr. Chuck takes part in the Legends Surf Classic

Duke’s OceanFest action on sand and sea