Ironman Triathlon Helps Kona Charities

The Ford Ironman World Championship will be held in Kona, on the “Big Island” of Hawaii, on October 21, just four weeks from today. The staff of the triathlon, which includes my daughter Linda Jane Kelley, is working literally around the clock to handle the thousands of details that must all come together perfectly. While the race is always well organized and exciting, there is a related story to be told.

The event brings many benefits to the Big Island, including economic activity, job opportunity, and publicity. The World Triathlon Corporation, the parent organization of the Kona triathlon, has also been extremely generous to many charitable organizations, particularly in the Kona area, but it may not have received recognition commensurate with its many good deeds.

Unlike the Honolulu Marathon, an athlete cannot just send in an application and a registration fee to participate in the Ford Ironman World Championship. The field is limited to 1,800 top athletes, most of whom qualify by performing exceptionally well in one or more of 20 Ironman Triathlon races in the U.S. and other countries, including Australia, Austria, New Zealand, South Korea, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Hawaii-based athletes may qualify by participating in the Ford Ironman 70.3 Honu, a half-Ironman-distance triathlon held on the Big Island each June.

Two hundred athletes win a race slot through a lottery, which is open to anyone and everyone worldwide.

For the past four years, the Ironman Foundation has auctioned six slots off on eBay. The minimum bid is $10,000, and all proceeds are given to charity. Some slots have sold for as high as $40,000. The Ironman Foundation picks up all the administrative costs.

This year’s eBay auction benefited C Different (an organization dedicated to helping visually impaired people), The Pediatric Cancer Foundation (which funds research to eliminate childhood cancer), and the Daniel Robert Sayre Memorial Foundation (a Big Island group that helps provide equipment and training for fire, rescue, and emergency organizations).

The generosity of the Ironman Foundation does not end there. There are 28 aid stations along the Ironman course, most of which are staffed by nonprofit groups. Each participating group receives $500.

In addition, in 2005, the Foundation gave grants totaling $20,000 to various Big Island nonprofit community organizations ranging from Friends of the Libraries Kona to Special Olympics West Hawaii.

Finally, in the past three years, the Ironman Foundation has raised more than $1 million for the construction of the first YMCA facility in Kailua-Kona.

Yes, the Ironman organization has been extremely generous and helpful to many nonprofit groups in Hawaii, particularly on the Big Island. And both the organization and the triathlon itself serve as great examples of the fact that In Hawaii, Tourism Is Everybody’s Business.

Congratulations and thanks to the Gills Family, owners of the World Triathlon Corporation; Ben Fertic, Ironman’s President and CEO; and all the staff and volunteers who not only make the Ford Ironman World Championship one of the world’s top athletic events, but also a significant fundraiser for so many important community organizations and charities.