2013: The Best of Times & The Worst of Times

By Dr. Richard Kelley

Charles Dickens’ classic novel, A Tale Of Two Cities, opens by describing a period in London and Paris at the time of the French Revolution, the late 1700s, as the best of times and the worst of times, depending on one’s circumstances. Today, the novel might be titled, A Tale Of Two Worlds, as many regions of our planet enjoy unparalleled prosperity while other areas, particularly, but not only, the Middle East, are suffering with riots, revolutions, terrorist attacks, rule by harsh dictators, assaults on minorities and women, famine, poverty, AIDS epidemics and so on.

Consider the following recent news:

• London: Airbus is predicting that the number of jet planes in the world will double in the next 20 years, largely to satisfy demand in emerging markets, particularly China. That will mean 29,220 new passenger and cargo aircraft plus another 10,400 aircraft needed to replace existing planes with more efficient models.

• Nairobi: Al-Shabab, an affiliate of the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda, attacked Nairobi’s upscale Westgate mall Saturday and held it for four days in a siege in which at least 67 people were killed. Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta immediately asked the U.S., UK and EU governments to refrain from issuing anti-travel advisories, which could further damage Kenya’s vital tourism industry on which 12.5 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP), 11 percent of total employment, 600,000 jobs and Kenya’s foreign exchange earnings rely.

• Honolulu: Hawai‘i tourism numbers for the first seven months of 2013 are up – arrivals by 5.7 percent and tourist spending by 5.7 percent over 2012, a record year. Mike McCartney, president and CEO of the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, put it simply: “Visitors from around the world continued to choose the Hawaiian Islands during the first seven months of 2013.”

• Washington, D.C.: House Armed Services Committee member, Rep. J. Randy Forbes wrote, “Over the past decade, China has been developing military capabilities designed to deny the United States access to the waters and airspace of the western Pacific. Through the acquisition of anti-ship ballistic missiles designed to target American aircraft carriers, advanced aircraft capable of hitting U.S. and allied bases around the region, and large numbers of modern submarines, Beijing has clearly signaled its intention to subvert the balance of power that has anchored peace in Asia for six decades, and to do so in ways inimical to American interests.”

Yes, it is an exciting or frightening world out there, depending on where you live and/or do business.

Fortunately, our company currently does business in areas that are relatively safe. However, we have to be constantly alert and training for man-made or natural disasters. An earthquake, a typhoon or tsunami, a volcanic eruption, or, as The Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado found out earlier this month, heavy rains followed by flooding can quickly change any location in the world from a pleasant resort to a disaster area.

Ambitious despots or extremist political groups no longer have to gather thousands of men and catapults to assault the walls of an ancient castle to initiate change. A few pounds of explosive carried by a suicidal volunteer or planted in the corner of a busy building can do unbelievable physical and psychological damage.

To prevent things like that from happening we need to be aware of the potential dangers and take all steps to make sure our properties are as safe as possible and that our disaster plans are up to date and our personnel are trained. These plans should include not only the physical safety of guests, staff and property, but crisis communication plans to be implemented during and after a significant incident. As The Stanley Hotel recently discovered, roads may be closed, landline and cell phone service may be compromised, Internet access may be cut off, and regular staff may be unable to come to work.

When it comes to politics, we all need to be better informed. We should be active in political committees and frequently communicate our feelings to our elected representatives at the local, state and national level.

Let’s work together to give A Tale of Two Worlds a happy ending. #8