Tony Del Piano Honored
By Dr. Richard Kelley

You may have seen this week’s Honolulu Star-Advertiser article highlighting the amazing life of an old friend and former employee, Tony Del Piano. It is such a good piece, and such a vivid reminder of the importance of good hospitality, that we decided to rerun it here in Saturday Briefing.

For years Tony was a fixture at the Front Desk of both Outrigger Waikiki on the Beach and Outrigger Reef on the Beach where he greeted every arriving guest and personally took phone reservations from others who wanted to book a return vacation. People from all over the world called to talk directly with Tony. He has the knack of making friends in an instant and literally every guest in the hotel felt like they were receiving special treatment by the Hotel Manager. And they were.

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

93 Year-old Retired Hotelier Tony Delpiano Remains Ambassador of Aloha

25 Years After Retiring as an Outrigger Hotels & Resorts General Manager Delpiano Voluntarily Works the Floor of the Outrigger Waikiki

By Allison Schaefers, The Honolulu Star-Advertiser
McClatchy-Tribune Regional News

Sept. 26, 2012—Tony Delpiano, 93, officially retired from his career as a general manager with Outrigger Hotels & Resorts about 25 years ago.

But the charming senior with a ready grin and sharp wit still spends every Friday morning voluntarily working the floor of the Outrigger Waikiki because his mentor Roy Kelley, the founder of the Outrigger hotel chain, told him to keep guests happy.

“Roy Kelley put me here and I listened to him,” Delpiano said from the koa-wood bench where he has carved out his own space in the hotel’s entry. “I talk to people. I ask them if they are having a good time and if there is anything that I can do for them.”

Growing up in Bristol, R.I., the child of Italian immigrants, Delpiano never envisioned spending a lifetime built around a Hawaii hotel career.

“As a kid, I didn’t even know what a hotel looked like,” he said.

Delpiano, who was one of seven surviving children, said that his family struggled to make ends meet.

“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,” he said.
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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 throughout 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 of the rooms in his hotel. His goal was 100% occupancy every day of the year!

Since retiring, Tony has kept active and healthy by taking daily long walks. I often see him on Diamond Head Road during my monthly visits to O’ahu.

Tony has also continued to volunteer as an Ambassador of Aloha and is a staunch supporter of Outrigger. Every Friday you will find him chatting with hotel guests and sharing wonderful stories about the old days in Waikīkī. He embodies what hospitality is all about: welcoming guests and making them feel special.

Thank you Tony for your years of loyalty and continued support of Outrigger and the Waikīkī tourism industry.

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But the course of Del Piano’s life was changed by war and by love. Three days after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the Navy and was sent to the Mediterranean, where he served on the destroyer USS Niblack (DD-424).

After the war ended, Del Piano got a job as a bellhop at the Boca Raton Hotel, the property that launched his hospitality career.

“I was the only one they hired because the uniform fit,” he said. “If I had been taller or shorter, I wouldn’t have gotten that job.”

While working at the hotel, Del Piano met the former Barbara Dorsam of Manoa. The couple, who were wed in 1954, have been married 58 years, but Del Piano still refers to his longtime bride as “this lovely one.”

“I had just been to Europe and I was too broke to get home, so I was working in a dress shop at the same hotel,” said Barbara Del Piano.

The couple, who worked across the hall from each other at the Boca Raton Hotel, quickly embarked on the romance that would bring Del Piano to Hawaii.

“Everybody was talking about Tony,” Barbara Del Piano said. “I couldn’t wait to meet him, and when I did I saw how handsome he was.”

After the two were married, they lived in Florida, where they had their first two of three children. Eventually, they moved to Hawaii where Del Piano started his career with Outrigger as a cashier at the Edgewater Hotel. However, he quickly moved up, going from the Outrigger Reef to the Outrigger Waikīkī, the Outrigger East and finally the Prince Kuhio, where he retired as general manager.

“I worked seven days a week when I first started,” Del Piano said.

Kelley and his wife, Estelle, who built the chain alongside his husband, set the bar high, he said.

“He didn’t like computers so we did everything by hand,” Del Piano said. “He didn’t have any neighbor island hotels because he didn’t want to own any that he couldn’t walk through. His managers didn’t sit behind a desk; we were always working the floor.”

While Outrigger employees worked hard, the Kelleys were generous, he said. “One day I came to work and asked to borrow $7,500 from Mr. Kelley so that I could buy a piece of property,” Del Piano said.

Kelley pondered Del Piano’s request over lunch and returned with a check.

Del Piano said, “He told me, ‘I guess Christmas came early.’”

Now Del Piano’s weekly visits to the Outrigger Waikīkī are a nod to Kelley’s generosity and to his insistence that employees provide personalized service.

“I remember asking him one time why we didn’t get a beautiful mailbox like the Moana,” Del Piano said. “He told me, ‘The mailbox stays under the desk. I want them to ask you where the mailbox is so you can get to know the guests.’”

Del Piano said he learned much about what guests wanted and shared those findings with Kelley.

Del Piano still shares insights with Outrigger Waikīkī General Manager Robert McConnell and Chuck Kelley, Kelley’s grandson.

“He’s still a wonderful ambassador for the company,” McConnell said. “A lot of our returnees have come to know him by name, and they look forward to coming back and catching up.”

Current employees, like Stan Daguay, who has worked for Outrigger for 45 years and once worked for Del Piano, also appreciate his weekly visits.

“He remembers names that I don’t even remember,” said the 70-year-old Daguay. “He still acts like he did when he was working. He’s amazing.”

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