Dr. Richard Kelley Honored
With Lifetime Achievement Award
By Dr. Chuck Kelley

This past Thursday evening, with hundreds of people in attendance, Dr. Richard Kelley was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual Business Leadership Hawai‘i dinner sponsored by Pacific Business News (PBN).

Limitations of time and space prevent me from listing more than a fraction of the extraordinary accomplishments that led to my father’s selection for this honor. However, among the Outrigger and OHANA Hotels ‘ohana, while Dr. Kelley is someone we regularly see and work with, I suspect many of us may not be aware of more than a few of the things he has done in his life that have made him, for many, a living legend. So let me mention some of the highlights.

My father has enjoyed two careers, the first being medicine, which is of course why he is still called “Dr. Kelley.” One interesting fact is that his early education was challenged by dyslexia – a type of learning disability – that he had to overcome. It was a condition not well understood at the time, and when he went away to college – Stanford University – he immediately faced the challenge of needing to earn straight As to make it into medical school. He overcame the challenge by simply working twice as hard as everyone else, and thereby earned a place at Harvard Medical School, one of the most prestigious in the nation. At Harvard he excelled in research, and at graduation, the white-coated academics must have puzzled about why he would consider leaving Boston for Hawai‘i, until the previous year a United States Territory and still a pretty sleepy place. Upon arriving in Honolulu, he practiced pathology at Queen’s Hospital for many years.

In loving partnership with two remarkable women – my mom, Jane Zieber Kelley, who passed away in 1978, and my step-mom, Linda V.G. Kelley – my dad successfully raised seven kids to adulthood. He was not exactly your everyday dad. While working as a practicing physician in our younger years, he also helped the fledgling University of Hawai‘i John A. Burns School of Medicine by teaching pathology – and was a favorite teacher of many students. He carried his love for teaching into our family as he brought home “show and tell” items for exciting dinnertime discussions about health issues. These included occasional lab specimens, and I suspect few other moms would have allowed such items in the house, much less at the dinner table!

During our high school years, the family home was a comfortable gathering place for many of our school friends. As Dr. Kelley hosted Sunday night barbecues, many teenagers sought his advice about personal issues and career aspirations. To this day, many recall the practical and helpful advice that he dispensed.

My dad did not just walk into the family hotel business. He learned it from the bottom up, working with his sisters Jean and Pat. All the Kelley kids pitched in with hotel duties such as serving breakfast to guests under the kiawe trees behind the Islander Hotel in Waikiki; folding towels and running clean linens to the Islander’s various “cottage” annexes, some of them blocks away from the main building on Seaside Avenue; working as a bellman, hauling guests’ bags up the Islander’s five flights of stairs; making ice cream floats for guests on the beach in front of where the Outrigger Reef now stands; and balancing the books every Friday evening, using a hand-cranked adding machine, often till the wee hours of the morning.

Later, while working as a physician, he somehow also found time to pitch in and help his parents, Roy and Estelle Kelley, build their growing Waikiki hotel business. After hours and on weekends he helped them with their latest projects – drafting hotel plans, securing building permits or supervising actual construction. I fondly recall his briefcase, always full of a mixture of medical slides, academic papers, drafting rulers.

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He joined Outrigger full-time in the early 1970s, a period when the Outrigger Waikiki on the Beach had recently been completed and Roy was overwhelmed with three other hotel projects whose construction he just had to get started immediately, before the city government moratorium on building in Waikiki kicked in. Dr. Kelley began introducing modern management techniques to the growing collection of hotels that his parents had run more or less by habit and force of personality. Over Roy’s vociferous opposition, my dad introduced the first computers. He soon found that the existing computer programs were unsuitable for hotel management, so after months of studying computer journals (which had now overtaken the pile of medical journals on his bedroom floor), he set about writing his own reservations and room-management software program, “Stellex” (honoring his mother, Estelle, Outrigger’s first reservationist), an upgraded version of which we are still using to this very day. A few years later, with the help of his new son-in-law, David Carey, he initiated the company’s growth beyond the shores of Waikiki to the neighbor islands, paving the way for the eventual expansion around the Pacific and into Asia that David has so ably led.

My dad learned marketing on the fly and traveled tirelessly around the country and around the world drumming up business for Outrigger and extolling the virtues of Hawai’i as a vacation destination. On our family summer vacations away from Hawai’i, there was usually an extra bag in our luggage that held Outrigger brochures, and if we passed a travel agency on the street, he would be sure to poke his head in, meet the owner and leave behind a few of those brochures.

As the meetings and convention business began to outgrow Honolulu’s limited facilities, my dad put aside his natural shyness and applied himself to learning public speaking. Addressing the need for a major convention center in Hawai’i, his logic and enthusiasm sparked the creation of the Hawai’i Convention Park Council. To his surprise, he found opposition to the idea on almost every side, including in our own visitor industry, but he persevered, and 15 years after he took up the cause, the Hawai’i Convention Center finally opened its doors. Today, he’s not only our dad … he’s called “the Father of the Convention Center.”

My dad has long been interested in a range of civic concerns and has not hesitated to take the heat for his often outspoken views on a number of issues, including the financing of visitor industry destination marketing, taxation, educational reform and health care. He served as chairman of Hawai’i’s Commission on Performance Standards for public school students and as a member of Governor Ben Cayetano’s Economic Revitalization Task Force, whose work helped bring Hawai’i out of a nearly decade-long economic slump in the 1990s. He has long spoken publicly and written newspaper columns about issues like these, saying what needs to be said, even when it might not be popular.

He chaired the Hawai’i Business Roundtable and what was then known as the Hawai’i Visitors Bureau.

He served as the driving force behind the effort to do a series of in-depth studies by the prestigious, London-based World Travel & Tourism Council on the impact of the visitor industry on Hawai’i’s economy. He has been an unwavering advocate of tourism in Hawai’i and its positive influence on our culture and economy. Ask him to give a presentation, and he will likely expound on the fact that here in Hawai’i, “Tourism Is Everybody’s Business!”

Today he continues to serve on the World Travel and Tourism Council’s Executive Committee, together with the CEOs and Chairmen of many of the world’s leading hotel chains and airlines. In this capacity, he continues to promote Hawai’i and bring home important business intelligence on the worldwide travel industry.

In Denver, where he and Linda Kelley have been living for the past two decades, Dr. Kelley somehow still finds time for charitable activities, twice serving as Chairman of the Colorado Neurological Institute’s board of directors. He is also a trustee of the University of Denver, a past board member of Craig Hospital and a past trustee of Kent Denver School.

The final thing I should mention is this publication you’re reading right now, Saturday Briefing. He has written this column virtually every week since he and Linda Kelley founded the publication in 1984 – for a total of over 1,300 articles now and still going strong. (This week’s article, which I’ve written, gives you a well-earned break, Dad.)

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Thanks to these and his many other accomplishments, Dr. Kelley has been honored on a number of previous occasions. SMEI Honolulu (Sales & Marketing Executives International) named him Sales Person of the Year in 1994 for his “profound and extensive contributions to developing the State of Hawai‘i as a tourist destination and as a desirable place to live and work.” SMEI is also the organization that named him the “Father of the Convention Center.” Earlier, the Hawai‘i Chapter of the American Marketing Association named him Marketer of the Year (1985). In 1995 he received the National Multiple Sclerosis Society’s highest tribute, the Hope Award, recognizing his many contributions to the community. The Hawai‘i Army Museum Society presented him with its Award in 2000. The Hawai‘i Chapter of NAIOP, the Commercial Real Estate Development Association, honored him with its Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003. In 2004, he was presented with the Legacy in Tourism Award from the University of Hawai‘i School of Travel Industry Management and the “O in Life” Award, the highest honor given by his alma mater, Punahou School. He was elected to the Hawai‘i Business Hall of Fame in 1993. Two weeks ago the Colorado Neurological Society honored Dr. and Mrs. Kelley with its Dawn Denzer Community Leader Award.

How else can I conclude this column than by saying, warmest congratulations, Dad. We’re all so very proud of you!
Dr. Kelley’s Acceptance Remarks

Following are Dr. Kelley’s remarks upon being presented with the Business Leadership Hawai’i Lifetime Achievement Award.

From the bottom of my heart … Mahalo. I am deeply honored and touched to receive this award, which recognizes the efforts of a lifetime.

Although I understand the intention has been to recognize me personally, the fact is that I could not have accomplished what I did alone.

Far from it. Many who have worked by my side are with us here this evening and I want to recognize them.

• My wife Linda has been my partner for over three decades during which time she fully shared in the joys of success, the long hours of work and the disappointment of some failures.
• Many members of my family, including my children and their families, and my sisters and their children.
• And there are several members of the Outrigger ‘ohana, who have given me wonderful support throughout their careers.

There are many others who have played an important role in my life who have retired or, sadly, passed on. This of course includes my parents, Roy and Estelle Kelley, who were not only patient, but inspiring as I made the transition from medicine to the travel industry. They, too, lived a life filled with exceptional achievements. I wish they were here tonight.

Many of my parents’ friends and business associates also took me under their wing and contributed to my education and the successes I have had.

I was lucky to have a particularly close relationship with Bob MacGregor, the head of Trade Wind Tours, at the time one of the largest tour wholesalers in Hawai’i. Bob gave me the equivalent of a Master’s Degree in Sales and Marketing. I toured the nation and world with him, attending travel trade shows and convincing people far and wide that Hawai’i was the greatest vacation spot on earth.

There were many others with whom I worked in close collaboration and who helped greatly in whatever successes I have achieved. They were not only in the Travel & Tourism industry, but all over this community – in organizations such as the Hawai’i Convention Park Council, Hawai’i Business Roundtable, Governor Cayetano’s Economic Revitalization Task Force and so on. We would be here until past midnight if I mentioned them all.

But I can sum it up by saying that if I’ve managed to achieve anything worthwhile, it’s because I’ve had an enormous amount of help and support.

So I accept this award not only for myself, but also for many other people … and especially for my family, friends and colleagues at Outrigger and OHANA Hotels & Resorts.

I have truly been a lucky guy!

Let me conclude on a slightly different note.

I’m sure most of you have heard me say, “In Hawai’i, Tourism Is Everybody’s Business.”

Some of you might even think that to the extent it continues to resonate, this message is one of my more significant achievements.

Perhaps.

But the important thing is that the message be kept alive.

Why?

For the sake of the economic well-being of virtually everyone in our community, which depends so heavily on the health of the visitor industry.

I believe this message needs to be continually relearned and re-absorbed. It doesn’t sink in right away. It gets forgotten. Young people need to hear it for the first time. And those who make policy and those who influence public opinion need to really understand the fundamental truth behind it, deep down in their bones.

Much as I’d like to be here forever to keep hammering this message home, the time has come for this important task to fall to others.

I can think of no more credible people than the leadership present in this room to make sure this message continues to be heard loud and clear:

“In Hawai’i, Tourism Is Everybody’s Business.”

I leave it in your capable hands.

Thank you again for this award and for honoring me with your presence. Mahalo.