Outrigger Employees Shine During Disaster

October 15 started off like any other lazy Sunday morning in Hawaii, until, that is, a 6.7 magnitude earthquake struck just off the Kona Coast of the Big Island. The temblor was felt all across our island state, and many residents, not to mention hotel guests, were still in bed when it hit at 7:07 a.m. Talk about a rude awakening! And it didn’t stop there. A few minutes later, an aftershock measuring 6.0 was also felt across most of the Hawaiian Islands, followed by a spate of smaller aftershocks throughout the day.

The Big Island took the brunt of the quake. Structural damage continues to be reported at businesses, homes, schools and hospitals, in addition to damage to highways, bridges and the harbor facilities at Kawaihae. Thankfully, though, no fatalities occurred and only a few minor injuries were reported. Most reports were of things tumbling off shelves and out of cabinets.

Outrigger and OHANA properties came through the quakes without any damage visible to the naked eye. Structural engineers will, however, provide professional assessments.

The most widely felt effect of the quake was the loss of power across much of the state. Interestingly, the neighbor islands saw their power return before Oahu did. In this situation, it seemed smaller was better. After the shaking caused generators accounting for about a quarter of Oahu’s generating capacity to shut down, Hawaiian Electric’s fail-safe system automatically closed down the rest of the island’s generators, to avoid overloading the system. Getting power back up proved a slow, methodical process, with most Oahu customers off line for most of the day and into the night. By midnight, however, most residents were back on line.

Thankfully, the quake did not affect most telephone lines, and it didn’t take long for the phones to start ringing at the Front Desks of all our properties, with anxious guests asking what had happened. As usual, the management and staff at all of our Outrigger and OHANA properties stepped up to the plate and immediately went into crisis mode.

As soon as the power failed in Waikiki, emergency generators kicked in at most of our properties, powering emergency lighting and elevators. It was a little more difficult initially at the Outrigger Waikiki because the generator did not come on right away, which meant dark hallways, dark staircases, and no escalator service for a couple of hours. Readily prepared, employees handed out glow sticks to guests and were stationed in the stairwells to assist guests as they made the trek up and down the stairs. Bellmen got more than their customary cardio workout, lugging suitcases down flights of stairs, while Herman Lam worked doggedly to get the generator up and running, which he did, some two hours later.

One guest was caught in the express elevator when the power failed, and General Manager Jim Heather could be seen calmly directing guests and emergency crews as firemen worked to free the guest, who was complaining of chest pain. Herman Lam and his team worked alongside the fire department and Otis Elevator to get the guest out as quickly as possible. Audible sighs of relief could be heard when the generator kicked in, allowing for emergency lighting and elevator service.

From the beginning, information was one of the most sought-after commodities. After the power failed, Honolulu’s KSSK was for some time one of the few radio stations on the air and quickly became the source of any quake-related information. It was via KSSK that we all heard from Governor Linda Lingle, who, coincidentally, was staying at a hotel on the Big Island’s Kohala Coast and shared the fact that she was literally jolted out of bed by the quake.

Other agencies also used the radio to relay information. Tourism and Department of Transportation officials provided updates on whether airports were open or closed and which flights were taking off or cancelled. Hawaiian Electric utilized the air waves to provide updates on when electricity would be restored to Oahu communities, and the general public called in to share stories of what they were doing when the earthquake hit.

From all I’ve heard, our employees’ quick and creative thinking, professionalism, and examples set the standard. Sunday was an opportunity to really show what you are doing when the earthquake hit.

The command center was quickly activated at the OHANA Maile Sky Court. Warren Ferreira and Jerry Dolak worked with Wackenhut to coordinate communications using their “sneakernet” of security officers, sending out bulletins to keep hotel guests informed.

• The command center was quickly activated at the OHANA Maile Sky Court. Warren Ferreira and Jerry Dolak worked with Wackenhut to coordinate communications using their “sneakernet” of security officers, sending out bulletins to keep hotel guests informed.

• All of our hotels quickly set up information desks where guests could ask questions and listen in on the radio broadcast. It soon became clear, however, that next to information, food was priority. A special mahalo to Chris Colgate and the staff at Duke’s Canoe Club and Hula Grill at the Outrigger Waikiki, and David Nagaishi and the staff at Shore Bird Restaurant at the Outrigger Reef. Without missing a beat, these restaurants and their teams pulled together to provide breakfast, lunch, and dinner for hotel guests and employees of these two hotels, not an easy feat when you’re working without electricity. The Outrigger Reef’s Chief’s
Hut gave its remaining inventory to Executive Housekeeper Myra Kuboyama so she could make sandwiches and snacks for employees. Myra was the “Mom,” taking care of everyone. It was obvious that the Housekeeping staff were not only taking care of the guest rooms, but making sure all the staff were taking their breaks, being fed, etc.

- The Outrigger Reef’s Outrigger Shops opened up quickly and accommodated guests’ needs on a cash basis.
- VP of Beachfronts Kimberly Agas called into the Outrigger Reef and was on her way to work minutes after the earthquake. No more than an hour or so after the first rumble, all the managers and maintenance staff (most of whom expected to be off that day) checked in to work. Long-time former GM Bruce Schneider even came by to check on things at the property. And EVP of Hospitality Services Barry Wallace stopped by at all Waikiki properties to assess the situation and lend his support.
- At the Outrigger Reef (ORF) Manager on Duty Debbie Murakami set the tone. She called the off-duty managers at 7:23 a.m. and took charge, keeping very calm and collected. Her voice over the PA system and behind the Front Desk answering questions was a very calming influence.

- Mandy Cruz and his ORF maintenance crew were on it. Thanks to their “can do” attitude, issues seemed to be minimized. For example, realizing the power outage was continuing into the evening, Mandy and his crew started replacing existing lights in the lobby with bright white lights to maximize lighting for staff and guests.
- Controller Janice Shizumura came in and assisted with the “help desk” that was set up in the ORF lobby to redirect guest departure and flight information inquiries away from the Front Desk. Janice jumped right in, helping reschedule flights and answer questions. She can have a job in guest relations anytime!
- Devin Ouchi, Front Services Manager at ORF, was on staff from 6 a.m. He and his bell crew helped monitor the status of rooms, as there were many guests who chose not to check out without advising the Front Desk. The Bell Desk was confirming room status and making sure guests were taken care of. The ORF Bell Desk also services the Waikiki Shore Resort. With no elevator service available there, the Bellmen had to check guests in and out, carrying bags up and down the stairwell – that’s 15 floors!
- Stanley Louis-Charles was the Guest Service Manager at ORF who was scheduled to be off. But Stanley’s kids could be seen in the lobby looking for “daddy.” Stanley was to be found helping organize the manual processes for the Front Desk, getting ready for arrivals to start coming in. Although he could have just taken care of the kids by staying home, instead he chose, like so many others that day, to come in to work! He set his kids up in the car watching DVDs and got busy helping support the staff on duty and assisting our guests – remarkable!
- ORF Housekeeping Clerk Thelma Fernandez was scheduled to work the 3 - 11 p.m. shift that day. She called in to see if anything was needed and found out there was no food for her co-workers. Thelma cooked rice on her gas stove at home, bought over whatever leftover food she had, and also brought in a supply of canned goods. Thelma’s food helped supplement what was provided by the property restaurants and helped feed Maintenance and the Front Desk lunch and dinner as well. After dinner, Thelma went up to help clean guestrooms because there were so many late check-out rooms and guests returning to the property because they were unable to get flights out. She also brought a radio so she could communicate status to the Front Desk. After all the rooms were done, she returned to her regular clerk work.
- Hong Wong and Zhi Ming Xu walked up 15 floors at the Outrigger Waikiki Shore (WSR) to serve some guests.
- OHANA Waikiki Beachcomber (OBC) kitchen staff Daniel Sagadraca and Jose Marzan prepared and handed out over 450 sandwiches between 6 and 8 p.m. for hungry hotel guests, to help tide them over to their next meal.
- Also at the OBC, Assistant Hotel Manager Windy Seguancia had switched to the morning shift on Sunday. Being newly married, she and her husband had been looking forward to a romantic dinner at Ruth’s Chris Steak House that evening. Unfortunately, that special dinner was not meant to be, but OBC was on the receiving end of a very special gesture. After working a long morning shift, Windy headed home and discovered she had power! She unselfishly made a huge pot of chili and rice and drove back to the hotel to personally deliver a home-cooked meal to some very hungry and appreciative employees.
- As Waikiki hotels and office buildings began to have their power restored, OBC hotel guests could be seen on their balconies, glow sticks in hand, anticipating a long-awaited moment. Power went on shortly after 9 p.m., and as you would expect, brought cheers and applause that could be heard throughout Waikiki!
- OHANA Islander Waikiki (OIW) employees were struggling to work through the chaos and sweating under the conditions, but not a complaint was heard. A big mahalo to Wendy Lee, Yue Jun Li, Tram Pham, Nu Yang, Adelina Balmilero, Nena Tran, Karen Fong, Yuk Han, Ching Tom, Hui Hua, Mei Ying, Judy Lui, Kenny Shimabuku, Victor Tong, Mel Servito, Eric Kim, Tim Rogness and Jinsoo Moon who were on duty at the time and collectively helped to keep the hotel running smoothly.
- OIW Guest Services Manager Bruce Musrasrik was off on Sunday but came in immediately after the earthquake. He
remained cool, calm and collected throughout the day – and night! He organized flashlights for the Housekeepers so they could continue to clean rooms; he placed a radio in the lobby for guests to keep up-to-date; he bought frozen dinners out of his own pocket and fed the entire staff at OIW; he also arranged for the night crew to be fed by OBC (thanks, OBC!).

The Aloha Spirit and sense of place was truly evident as this close-knit team became even closer when the going got rough. There were several employees who were not scheduled to work, but reported in as soon as they heard about the earthquake. Many thanks to Jimmy Uehara, Gina Reeves, Wayne Talaro and Steve Hu. Awesome teamwork, quick creative thinking, and initiative on everyone’s part better prepared the property to respond.

• The Outrigger Luana Waikiki (LWS), as we all know, is a bit off the Waikiki beaten path, and when vendors were closed, employees didn’t have too many options for food. Lily Tran to the rescue! She made bowls of saimin, one by one, in the microwave (powered by the emergency generator), so each Housekeeper would have something to eat.

• Also at the LWS Executive Housekeeper Susie Coloma stayed until 1 a.m. and did laundry in the onsite facility to make sure the property would have enough linen for all of the early check-out rooms the following day (with the airport reopened).

• At the OHANA East (OEH), the Front Desk crew kept processing guest data and helping other hotels whose Stellex connectivity was disrupted.

• Chuck’s Cellar at the OEH used its gas range to prepare lunches for employees.

• At the OHANA Waikiki West (OWH), Edna Salvador and Dr. Chuck Kelley went to the Food Pantry and loaded up on peanut butter, jelly and bread for the staff. PB&J never tasted so good!

• Outrigger Waikiki (OWK) Executive Housekeeper Ivy Kwok conducted her morning briefing by light filtering through a crack in the door, while Housekeepers, glow sticks in hand, eagerly readied themselves to climb the stairs to make up rooms and help guests. What a team!

• Gloria Daoang came in early to OWK. Ivy Kwok called her the “Road Runner” — running over to OBC to pick up glow sticks, running from floor to floor to get the status on check-out rooms, and running to deliver over 20 buckets of ice, extra towels, glow sticks, and other supplies to guests.

• Mercy Mariano made several trips up to the 16th floor of OWK to get room status updates while the phones were out of service. Ivy, too, made the trek — wow, these ladies are in shape!

• Barbara Lam led and motivated her OWK Public Area crew throughout the day. She also set up the buffet line, assisting the staff of Hula Grill and Chuck’s Steakhouse in feeding a lot of hungry employees and guests.

• OWK’s morning shift room cleaners stayed on schedule using the Team Cleaning method to ensure guest safety and to complete their assignments.

• Doris Chu and Delia Estacio, morning and evening Control Clerks at OWK, updated the check-out status of the rooms in a timely manner while keeping in communication with the Front Desk. Both deserve kudos for their calmness and professionalism.

• The evening crew at OWK, Siu Sum, Susanna Guan and Yan Ling, baked 1,300 cookies and popped tons of popcorn while still fulfilling guest requests.

• Shin Y. Lee, also at OWK, quietly and efficiently went about keeping the public restrooms and lobby areas clean. Not an easy task, as everyone congregated in the area and basically treated it as their “living/dining room.” Great job under these difficult circumstances!

• OWK’s Kin Ho Cheang, Alex Sheen, and Kelvin Shiu handled all their assignments on schedule. A special mahalo to Alex who worked a double shift to keep the in-house laundry running during the graveyard shift, helping ease the United Laundry delivery shortage the next day.

• Jim Heather ran up to each floor of the OWK to tie the doors open on the mauka side to bring light into the corridors. He took quick action very calmly and professionally. Ivy said he perspired so much that he had to change his shirt twice! Jim set up the free buffet lines with cookies and popcorn, and set up the movie “Harry Potter” for everyone to watch. Guests were very happy, high spirited and appreciative.

• Brian Fong and Meali’i Richardson led the OWK Front Desk team, who operated efficiently and smoothly throughout.

• While manning the OWK Bell Desk, Robert Uchida was still able to help turn over the lobby in normal condition within 30 minutes after power was restored.

• Milagros Robiniol is the AM Lobby Cleaner at OWK and set up the restrooms, lobby, and guest floor corridors with glow sticks to make it safe for both guests and co-workers. While distributing glow sticks on the 16th floor, she saw an elderly guest struggling to carry her suitcases down the stairwell. Without hesitation, Milagros took the guest’s bags and escorted her safely down the stairs.
Barry Wallace witnessed an OWK guest who was frantic at not being able to access cash from the ATM. She found a hero in Bellman Jiro Kim who gave her $100 out of his own pocket! Wow!

Generators run on diesel, and the reality was that many were running low on fuel. Outrigger East’s Maintenance Foreman Eddie Vierra and OHANA VP Chuck Shishido loaded 55 gallon drums on Eddie’s truck to make a diesel run, and Shay Lam, Director of Operation Services, used her personal contact to refuel our generators for the long haul.

OHANA Maile Sky Court (OMC) Maintenance used a makeshift gas-fired grill to heat food for lunch.

(OMC) Housemen were spotted waiting patiently in long lines at grocery and ABC stores for supplies.

On Maui, Regional Manager Jim Hill said the earthquake served best to reinforce his confidence in his Maui property ‘ohana. He reported, “Other than the obvious losses of power and the basic fear and helplessness felt when experiencing the strength of Mother Nature, the staffs at all the properties rose to the occasion.” There were no incidents or injuries of concern. The extra effort, time and consideration of staff seemed to be very much appreciated by guests, limiting their concerns and allowing them to continue their vacations (albeit with a bit more excitement). Communication efforts were critical and well taken care of by all staff and management.

Our ‘ohana on Kauai reported none of the difficulties of the other islands and felt fortunate to escape most of the hardship caused by the earthquake. Some communication interruptions were experienced as a result of the power outage on Oahu. Property Front Desk teams were well informed and shared information with guests as needed, as all the local radio stations were out. A few guests were delayed in checking in but all properties were standing by with rooms available for just that reason. At Outrigger Lae nani Guest Service Agent Rosana Matlock volunteered to extend her shift to assist with tired, confused, late-arriving guests. Kauai condominium owners were assured via e-mail that their property and friends were all OK. Overall, our Kauai properties made sure guests were reassured and then thoughts turned to ‘ohana on the other islands where the consensus is that the hero came out in all.

Regional Manager Ted Hardie reported from the island hardest hit, Hawaii. He said they needed to let a few people back into their units following the quake. “Seems they jumped out of bed, forgetting what they had on (or in one case, what they didn’t have on), and ran out of the room without the key. Housekeepers let them back in as respectfully as possible!” Ted visited every Big Island property and said it was wonderful to find out that all Managers and staff recognized they would be needed, got in their cars, and went in to work! Our Big Island ‘ohana showed their loyalty to their staff and the property, and it has been mentioned more than once that it hasn’t always been that way. Ted said, “You sort of expect people to do the right thing, but when something like this happens and you know they have the same issues at home as the people we host, it’s all the more touching. It’s pretty special when you experience the kokua spirit on top of the aloha spirit. At every property, everyone came in because it was in their hearts. Not one complaint. I couldn’t be more proud of the people we get to work with every day.”

Kris Nickelsen said Outrigger Fairway Villas was business as usual. All reported for work and as happened at all our properties, the Front Desk staff and management kept guests up-to-date on travel delays. Employees checked each individual unit to ensure all were well and everything was in order, as well as checking on the units at Fairways at Mauna Lani.

General Manager Bob Berges from Kona Hawaiian Resort is a relative newcomer to Outrigger and was amazed that all but one person made it to work that day. Even though employees experienced damage to their homes, they still came to work and spent the entire day getting the resort back in order. Even staff who were not scheduled to work came in to assist.

General Manager Chuck Okazaki at Outrigger Kanaloa at Kona said hats off to his staff. By 8 a.m. his Chief Engineer John Caravalho, Front Office Manager Sandy Niihau, Chief of Security Jim Griffin, and Executive Housekeeping Assistant LeeAnn Frias were all on property. Although each of their own homes suffered a lot of damage, they made their way to the property and took care of all emergency procedures. Remember that Kanaloa is comprised of 38 three- and four-story wood structures, so you can imagine how much movement the buildings went through. Chuck said they were swaying, along with their 203 coconut trees! Being the Sunday before the Ironman Triathlon, the property was almost at full capacity, so there were lots of guests to worry about, but all reports were that everything went smooth as silk. Guests were informed and all gas was shut off until all units were inspected. Chuck said, “I know everyone is saying that ‘they’ are management; that’s their job, but it is times like this that show they really care. They all have their own families and homes to worry about; it would have been easy to say, ‘I can check on them later,’ but they did a quick check on their own family, and once knowing they were all right, they were on property. I could not thank them enough. I was on Maui with my family when this all took place. I cannot express the helpless feeling I had with no communication, no information, and no way of getting back to Kona. Once I made contact with the property, and was informed who was there and taking charge, I felt a load lifted off me. It is truly an ‘ohana here, and I am proud of them all.”

At the Outrigger Keauhou Beach, Front Desk staff, Guest Services Representative Francine Masuhara, and Bellman Pete Benson kept guests informed and were in contact with the airlines to provide updates. They were essential for maintaining calm and order throughout the morning. Luckily, within 40 minutes electricity was restored!
Also at the Outrigger Keauhou Beach, Daryll Hersche, F&B Director; Anabelle Smith, Sr. Sales Manager; Jeanning Aldrete, Rooms Division Manager; and Rebecque Rezentes, Executive Housekeeper, came in on their day off to assist. Security Officer Rick Dean, who had just gone off shift, turned around and came back to help.

The staff at the Outrigger Keauhou Beach handled everything beautifully throughout, remaining calm while assisting guests. The F&B operation reopened as soon as power came back on. A special mahalo to Housekeeping for going back on the floors and resuming their duties.

Security Manager Dan Boyle received special comments on his professionalism.

In the midst of everything else, the Outrigger Keauhou Beach managed to accommodate 45 unexpected walk-ins from several other resorts that were unable to accommodate their incoming guests.

The property did sustain minor cosmetic damage; however, Krochina Engineering quickly gave the property a clean bill of health!

Several Ironman groups were already in house, including media and event organizers. They are not likely to forget this Ironman!

And finally, a couple of e-mails from guests of our Waikiki beachfront properties: “I would like to applaud the work of the entire staff of the hotel and restaurant. We are staying at the hotel and you all made the experience as comfortable as you could. I was; however, disappointed that I did not see a tip collection available although that shows how sincere your entire team was. As a father of four children, I can tell you that they were unphased by the whole experience and still had a fun day, except that the TVs wouldn’t work. Thank you once again. You all did a wonderful and exceptional job yesterday.”

Another wrote, “Thank you to the hotel staff that worked on Sunday of the earthquake. They were professional, helpful, and handled the unexpected in an organized way. Something that could have caused guests to feel inconvenienced was handled in such a way that it was more of an adventure. Thanks again for the great service in such a trying time and please tell your staff they deserve high praise for how they handled the day of the earthquake while working when they should have been more concerned with their own homes and family!”

In general, the day and night were all about helping one another, chipping in and doing whatever needed to be done to keep our guests and staff safe, fed and informed. In my mind, it is a very crucial reminder about emergency preparedness, both at the hotel level and for each of us personally. In my heart, I give thanks to each and every one of you whose loyalty to the company and compassion for others make Outrigger & OHANA Hotels & Resorts shine like the star that it is.