APEC 2011 – An Outstanding Success!

By Dr. Richard Kelley

As the last caravan of black limos surrounded by blue-light-flashing police escort vehicles headed for Honolulu International Airport, and as the barricades tracing along Saratoga Avenue and around Ft. De Russy are lifted onto trucks and headed for storage, many have been evaluating APEC 2011.

APEC may not have been a four-letter word in the minds of many Honolulu residents before last week. But by the time President Obama and his fellow heads of state – together with their thousands of delegation members, businessmen and -women, journalists, security people, airplane crews and assorted functionaries – from 20 other Pacific Rim nations headed out of town a few days ago, it had certainly left more than a few people muttering darkly.

Was it a success? Was it worth it? Was it a learning process? Could some things been done better?

My view – Yes, Yes, Yes, and Yes.

For America and the world, APEC brought together leaders representing 40 percent of the people on our planet and 55 percent of global economic output (GDP) for constructive talks about improving relations between their nations, reducing barriers to trade, and increasing all sorts of opportunities for everyone who lives and works in the economies bordering the Pacific Basin.

For Hawai’i, it showed the nation and the world that our tropical archipelago is an excellent place to hold serious meetings, conferences and conventions, and that our visitor industry and our community are capable of handling gatherings with even the most complex and demanding requirements.

What leads me to these conclusions? All the things I’ve seen and heard, both directly and in my conversations with David Carey, Dr. Chuck Kelley and so many other colleagues who were on the ground, working with our APEC guests.

If I had to boil down all the visitors’ impressions I’ve heard about to a few simple things, they would be these:

Hawai’i is a delightful place – the beauty of the land and sea, the gentle climate, the great hotels and food, and most of all, the friendly, helpful people and the aloha they freely shared, which left so many people smiling.

Honolulu is a terrific place for a serious meeting. All reports were that everyone at the Hawai’i Convention Center and the various hotels were world-class professionals. When it comes to handling a serious meeting, Hawai’i clearly knows how to hit a home run and can easily hold its own in competition with New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., or anywhere else that routinely hosts conventions and other important meetings.

In financial terms, APEC was an investment for the future. Total attendance, hotel occupancy, shop sales, banquet and restaurant utilization, etc., did fall somewhat short of hoped-for numbers. This was due in part to the extraordinary security requirements of a gathering of 21 heads of state and government. As a result, many leisure visitors and local residents stayed away and left Waikīkī to the VIPs, journalists, et al. However, APEC 2011 has generated a new awareness of Hawai’i as an outstanding venue for important meetings, and that will pay off in the form of more and more meetings on O‘ahu and the neighbor islands in years to come. And that, in turn, means jobs and tips for thousands of people and new business for hundreds of local shops, restaurants, attractions and hotels.

Clearly, the closing of streets, the placement of barricades around Waikīkī and the stringent security measures were not only a major inconvenience, but also kept some people from getting to work while forcing shorter hours and reduced tips for many others. Many shops and restaurants

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David Carey and Dr. Chuck greet
Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand William “Bill” English

Dr. Chuck extends an Aloha to Prime Minister of Australia Julie Gillard

David Carey welcomes Rt. Hon. Mike Moore, New Zealand’s Ambassador to the U.S. (left) and Rt. Hon. Kim Beasley, Australia’s Ambassador to the U.S. (right)

lost business – and a few actually closed their doors for the duration.

Such extraordinary security measures are a regrettable product of the times in which we live. As suggested by author Tom Clancy in his adventure books featuring Jack Ryan, the possibility of a lethal attack on a president or presidential motorcade is well within the realm of possibility. It certainly happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

Disrupting closure of roads to accommodate political VIP passage happens frequently in Washington, D.C., and across our nation. I experience it in Denver every time Barack or Michelle Obama comes to town for a political fundraiser.

Despite these significant disruptions, it’s clear to me that APEC was nevertheless a resounding success in terms of its primary objective: the long-term economic boost for Hawai’i that it is likely to produce.

For a view from the front lines, see Bill Comstock’s accompanying article on the scene at the Outrigger Reef and observations from Dean Nakasone, Marsha Kapu, Pam Cabrera and Simeon Miranda at the Holiday Inn® Waikiki Beachcomber, Embassy Suites® - Waikiki Beach Walk®, Outrigger Luana Waikiki and our affiliate property OHANA Honolulu Airport Hotel.

Many in our company and throughout our community deserve enormous praise and thanks for their hard work in planning, preparing for and expertly executing all the details that led to the success of APEC 2011.

Kudos to Gregg Yamanaka, CEO of the APEC 2011 Host Committee; Peter S. Ho President and CEO, Bank of Hawaii, and Chair of the Host Committee; and David Carey, President and CEO, Outrigger Enterprises Group and a member of the Host Committee.

Special applause for Outrigger ‘ohana members Kaipo Ho and Pila Hanson for developing and providing meaningful and unique ho’okipa (hospitality) training for APEC volunteers and workers through a program known as C.A.R.E. (Create A Remarkable Experience).

And finally, a special thanks to everyone in our ‘ohana for the tireless work, dedication and spirit they demonstrated time and time again before, during and after APEC 2011! You are the greatest! ☺️
Yes, there were moments of excitement during APEC 2011: the President’s motorcade passing the hotel, streets closed with soldiers on the corners armed with some pretty impressive firepower, greeting the prime ministers and various cabinet-level dignitaries, but I must say the overwhelming memory I will take away is the pride I felt being a member of the Reef Team.

It is difficult to express the complexities involved in hosting the delegations, including Prime Minister Julia Gillard of Australia and Deputy Prime Minister William English of New Zealand, and the personnel from Aeroflot, Russia’s national airline. Rooms had to be converted to offices, large areas designated for storage, deliveries coordinated — the list is endless. Office locations and room assignments moved daily. The only constant in all this was change.

A good example was the room assignments for an Aeroflot flight carrying high-level APEC attendees. Details, including arrival dates, changed often. When we finally received the rooming list, they demanded we provide the keys 24 hours in advance. We complied, keyed the rooms and handed over arrival packets the day prior to arrival.

A few hours before the scheduled arrival time, a dour Russian security officer approached the Aeroflot contact, handed him the real rooming list and demanded he be allowed to inspect all the pilots’ rooms. We re-keyed and re-stuffed everything and off they went to pick up the crew at the airport.

When the crew arrived, the contact sheepishly approached the front desk and told us that their security staff had lost all the key packets! We jumped into action and replaced everything. As we were standing at the desk, an Aeroflot official approached me, apologized and said that the security officer might be spending the next year in Vladivostok, in Siberia, preparing for APEC 2012. Somehow I don’t think he was joking.

Every change snowballed and affected nearly every department. I can’t begin to tell you the hours spent unblocking and blocking rooms by Sales and the Front Desk. Those changes rolled down to Housekeeping, Food & Beverage, Engineering, Bell and Accounting departments. There was no time to rest.

Now that the event is winding down, Engineering and Housekeeping need to reconvert the temporary offices back into sleeping rooms. Accounting has less than 24 hours to turn a jumble of folios and banquet checks into coherent billings, which can be presented by the end of the day Monday.

I hesitate to list names, as I am afraid that I will forget someone or fail to convey their contributions, but here goes:

- Alan White’s IT team was in the mix from the start. Bob Owens and Brian Takenaka brought in a new Internet provider to ensure consistent Internet signals for our guest delegations.
- Shay Lam’s team of Russell Helton and Bill Dailey aided Mon Lacuata and spent two weeks rewiring rooms and adding phone lines to provide extra capacity to the rooms being used as offices.
- Jerry Dolak met with the Secret Service and State Department for months prior to APEC and then moved on property for the event.
- Patsy Narimatsu, Gina Reeves and Luana Maitland moved into the hotel early in the week and served as our liaisons 24/7.
- Dietrich Chillous and Tino Geronimo might as well have moved in as they were here all hours of the day and night helping take care of our guests.
- Ricol Akana-Philips, Jennifer Padre, Renee Kiyono, Beverly Fidel and Jana Matsunaga funneled changes and details to all the departments to ensure our success.
- Mandy Cruz and Myra Kuboyama led the Maintenance and Housekeeping teams.

As I said, this list is inadequate. It doesn’t begin to name all those who dealt with the countless details and continual changes, which were thrown at them for the 10 days of APEC 2011. So, whether it was the Housekeeping team that had just one hour to turn 22 rooms; or the Food & Beverage team who found out the day before that they would need to prepare employee meals on top of several functions and continual meeting room changes; or our Front Desk team who handled constant room, billing, and arrival and departure changes but managed to ensure that all our non-APEC guests still felt special; or Front Services and
Elite Valets whose normally chaotic entrance was turned into sheer bedlam with diplomatic and security vehicles, road closures and motorcades, it was the Reef Team who, despite all odds, prevailed.

**Holiday Inn® Waikiki Beachcomber Resort**
*By Dean T. Nakasone, CHA*

APEC week went really well at Holiday Inn® Waikiki Beachcomber. The Garuda Indonesia aircrew and a business delegation from Vietnam told us they thoroughly enjoyed their stay. Of course, there were lots of changes and last-minute details to cover but thanks to their extraordinary efforts, our hotel team handled everything smoothly and efficiently.

**Embassy Suites® - Waikiki Beach Walk®**
*By Marsha L. Kapu and Bob Yeoman*

Embassy Suites® - Waikiki Beach Walk® was honored to provide a safe and convenient haven to the support team of Indonesia’s President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who was next door at the Trump Tower. Our staff went above and beyond to assist with their ever-changing needs.

We also hosted Vietnam Airlines’ Chairman, Pham Viet Thanh, plus 30 of his business associates and aircrew. Special arrangements were offered to create a remarkable experience that included fresh flowers; refresh service twice a day and turn-down service each evening were among many thoughtful details.

Both of our special groups told us how extremely satisfied they were with our service, hospitality and accommodations. They personally assured us that they will definitely return to Embassy Suites® - Waikiki Beach Walk®.

**Outrigger Luana Waikiki**
*By Pam Cabrera*

A 30-room group from the U.S. State Department’s Presidential Support Staff stayed with us for over a month beginning in mid-October. When they arrived, most were stressed and worried about everything from their hotel room, the climate, their long stay and their upcoming APEC duties. However, the team at the Outrigger Luana Waikiki has a great way of making guests feel comfortable, and we did our best to be as accommodating as possible.

We got to know many of them as they worked all different kinds of hours preparing for the important week. Many of them came down to the desk at night and conversed with our staff, telling them about their jobs, family and life back home. We became their temporary families for a month, and we are all better people for having the opportunity to gain knowledge about this important team.

As they left, many were in tears as they told us how sad they were to leave Hawai‘i and their new friends. Many asked for business cards and email addresses so they can stay in touch, and many promised to return.

APEC generated a nice piece of business for us, but at the Outrigger Luana Waikiki, we feel even more rewarded because we all made some wonderful new friends.

**OHANA Honolulu Airport Hotel**
*(an affiliate property)*
*By Simeon Miranda*

Thanks to our pet-friendly policies, during APEC 2011, we had the Customs & Border Patrol teams and their sniffer dogs with us. They thoroughly enjoyed their stay and we received many compliments including the following, which sums up their feelings pretty well. “Woof, woof! Arf, arf! Awooooooo!”