Roy & Estelle Kelley are Inducted into Hawaii Hospitality Hall of Fame

Hawaii Hospitality Hall of Fame inductees Roy and Estelle Kelley, circa 1950

Jean Rolles (right) accepts the Hall of Fame award on behalf of her parents Roy and Estelle Kelley from Pris Texeira long-time Kelley family friend and Hall of Fame Trustee

Dr. Chuck Kelley, Jean Rolles, and Kathy Carey with a rendering of the “Wall of Fame,” which will feature the names of the inductees and be adjacent to the Hawaii Convention Center’s fourth floor ballroom

Tuesday, November 20, was a history-making, history-celebrating evening for Hawaii’s hospitality industry. That night, in a Hawaii Convention Center gala attended by 500 people, 26 men and women were inducted into the brand new Hawaii Hospitality Hall of Fame. Two of the honorees were my parents, Roy and Estelle Kelley, the founders of Outrigger Enterprises Group. (All the inductees are listed below.)

The Hawaii Hospitality Hall of Fame was formed in 2006 to recognize those individuals who have made outstanding contributions to Hawaii’s tourism industry. For its charter class, the organization’s board of trustees selected individuals who, although they are no longer with us, were true pioneers in developing the building blocks that put Hawaii on the map as one of the world’s most popular visitor destinations. The honorees represent the full spectrum of Hawaii’s tourism industry – hotel, airline, and travel company executives, developers, entertainers, and others who helped the industry blossom and then flourish. The names of the inductees will be enshrined on a “Wall of Fame” adjacent to the Hawaii Convention Center’s fourth floor ballroom.

The evening, which was themed “Celebrate a Legacy in Tourism,” was sponsored by the University of Hawaii’s School of Travel Industry Management and its Alumni Association, together with the Hawaii Hospitality Hall of Fame board of trustees.

Although I was unable to attend the function, my sister, Jean Rolles, stood proudly to accept the award honoring our parents. Kathy Carey and Dr. Chuck Kelley, two of Roy and Estelle’s nine grandchildren, were also present.

The evening brought back so many memories for both of us. Every inductee was known to my parents, and to my sister and me, too. Some were personal friends of the family, and some were business partners. Everyone in the visitor industry was very close and worked together in those early days.

Here are a few examples of that collaboration and camaraderie that I witnessed:

As visitors began to arrive in increasing numbers and on Group Inclusive Tours (GIT), there was a need for buses to move them to and from the airport or around the islands for sightseeing. Roy Kelley and Bob MacGregor responded by forming a transportation company. To publicize the arrival of the
first bus in Waikiki, they laid down surplus World War II aircraft landing mats on the sand and drove the gleaming vehicle right onto Waikiki Beach for photos and a blessing!

When there was a need for quality taxis and rental cars on Oahu, MacGregor and Roy Kelley teamed up again to start a taxi company and a u-drive firm.

When Lyle Guslander developed the hotel now known as the OHANA Islander Waikiki, he used to walk down the street and get ideas on marketing from Roy and Estelle. With tongue in cheek, Guslander named the hotel’s bar Shipwreck Kelley’s in honor of Roy.

Walter Child and his son Dudley helped finance the construction of the Outrigger Waikiki and OHANA East hotels. In return, the Kelley family invested in the Childs’ company, InterIsland Resorts.

Grace Buscher Guslander made Kauai’s Coco Palms a special place and invited the Hawaii Hotel Association to hold its meetings there. Andy Anderson often sang at those gatherings. In 1958, Grace recognized the visitor industry contributions of Roy and Estelle Kelley by asking them to plant a coconut tree in the grove behind the hotel. They did so and said that the tree was being planted in honor of their recently born first grandson, Chuck Kelley.

I could go on for several pages with vignettes about each of the Hall of Fame inductees.

Some thought that a few of those honored last week were too cozy. The federal government alleged that Roy Kelley, Henry Kaiser, Ed Hastings (Hilton Hawaiian Village), and Dick Holtzman (Sheraton) were secretly meeting as a group called “The Martini Club” to fix hotel room prices. I know that the charges were not true, but the parties settled out of court to avoid the costs and risks of proving their innocence before a judge and jury.

Yes, those were interesting times.

In a prepared statement read at the dinner, Governor Linda Lingle said, “Tonight’s inductees were the leading innovators of the tourism industry. They were the visionaries who cultivated Hawaii’s premier destination status in a way that has been called the ‘model’ for tourism development throughout the world.

“These remarkable leaders not only had the vision, but they had the courage and dedication needed to make their dreams a reality, for which we are all grateful.

“While honoring them, we should also look to them as examples of the continued creativity and hard work that will be necessary to build on the prosperity of our state’s strongest industry, as we lead in today’s global economy.”

It is an honor to have our founders, Roy and Estelle Kelley, among the first to be inducted into the Hawaii Hospitality Hall of Fame, especially during what is our company’s 60th anniversary year. My parents helped bring the dream of a Hawaii vacation within the reach of so many by providing exceptional value in Island hospitality.

Through the years we have grown tremendously, through building, acquisitions, and partnerships. In size and scope we are no longer the same company my parents began when they opened their first hotel in 1947. What remains, however, and continues to guide us even today, are the principles Roy
and Estelle taught all of us – value relationships with customers, employees, and business partners, and deliver value to each and every one.

They never wavered from that wise philosophy and neither shall we.

The inaugural inductees into the Hawaii Hospitality Hall of Fame

- R. Alex Anderson Hotelier/Composer
- Edward Barnet School of Travel Industry Management
- Bick Bickson Budget Rent-A-Car
- Walter D. Child, Sr. InterIsland Resorts
- W. Dudley Child, Jr. InterIsland Resorts
- Hung Wo Ching Aloha Airlines
- Webley Edwards Hawaii Calls
- Mark Egan Hawaii Visitors Bureau
- Lyle Guslander Island Holidays
- Grace Buscher Guslander Coco Palms Resort
- Ed Hastings Hilton Hawaiian Village
- Chris Hemmeter The Hemmeter Corporation
- Chinn Ho Capital Investment Company
- Don Ho Entertainer
- Bob Holden Sheraton Hawaii
- Richard Holtzman Sheraton Hawaii/Rock Resorts
- Duke Kahanamoku Ambassador of Aloha
- Henry Kaiser Kaiser Hawaiian Village
- Roy and Estelle Kelley Outrigger Hotels & Resorts
- Stanley Kennedy, Sr. Hawaiian Airlines
- Bob MacGregor Tradewind Tours
- Jimmy MacKenzie MacKenzie Tours
- William Mullahey Pan American World Airways
- Pat Patterson United Airlines
- Mary K. Robinson Robinson Travel