Warmest Aloha to CFO Mel Wilinsky
By Dr. Richard Kelley

On Monday, December 19, a number of our ‘ohana will gather on the Voyager Deck of the Outrigger Reef on the Beach to share our aloha with Mel Wilinsky who is retiring at the end of the month after 19 remarkable years of service to Outrigger Enterprises Group.

Mel came to Outrigger from Atlanta in 1992. I have to chuckle remembering that, with his being used to the formality of mainland offices, it took us a couple of months to get him into an aloha shirt! Since then, Mel has settled in just fine, although he still comes in to work before the sun peeks over Koko Head and often leaves after it has dipped into the Pacific behind the cruise boats off Waikiki. Mel never did get a tan to go with the aloha shirts he now so comfortably sports!

One of my more memorable moments with Mel was in 1995 when I had the pleasure of presenting him with the Chairman’s Award, the highest honor a member of Outrigger’s senior management can receive. What was especially remarkable was that Mel’s stand-out work had earned him this recognition after he had been with Outrigger for only three years – actually, not quite three – at the time. Mel’s drive hasn’t slackened a bit in the 16 years since then. As David Carey put it, “Mel is well known for having only one speed—‘warp-plus.’”

In announcing Mel’s impending retirement several weeks ago, David described Mel as “an exceptional financial and business leader” and noted that beyond his having been recognized for his many contributions to our company, Mel “is also highly respected in the finance and hospitality communities, both locally and nationally.”

“During Mel’s time at Outrigger,” David wrote, “the Company has made numerous bold strategic moves to grow our business, and each of these moves required visionary, strategic and innovative financial strategies and solutions that Mel created and led with unparalleled distinction. These moves included our expansion to the Neighbor Islands and other parts of the Pacific; the unsolicited, extraordinary sale of our Australia management rights at a unique moment in time; the revitalization of Waikiki through Outrigger’s historic Waikiki Beach Walk® project; the forging of a new partnership with Wyndham Vacation Ownership; and the navigation of the Company through unprecedented global economic challenges, including after the September 11 national tragedy and over the past few years as we’ve experienced one of our country’s most challenging economic times.”

I share the great pleasure David has expressed at Mel’s agreeing to our request to stay on as an advisor for a period of time after his retirement, so “we can continue to benefit from his strategic thinking and financial expertise.”

Senior V.P. Human Resources & Planning Ruthann Yamanaka spoke with Mel recently, and he has allowed us to share with the readers of Saturday Briefing the answers he gave to her questions:

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Ruthann: Why are you retiring now?
Mel: After nearly 20 great years with Outrigger, during which time I gave the company my all, my wife and I decided while we were still “young” enough, we wanted to do things we just couldn’t do given the lack of time available to us. We also wanted the flexibility to watch our grandchildren grow as they marked their milestones in life. It also seemed like the right time for me to step aside and allow the next generation of managers at Outrigger to spread their wings and take the company to greater levels of success.

Ruthann: What among your many accomplishments do you feel most proud of in your many years of dedicated service at Outrigger?
Mel: Several things come to mind.
• Helping navigate the company through the post-9/11 period, helping to build, along with the great team in Australia, our portfolio of assets “Down Under” and then being fortunate to be able to sell that portfolio in what is arguably one of the most profitable transactions in Outrigger’s history.
• Equally important to me has been the ability, along with my Finance team, to successfully close literally hundreds
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of millions of dollars in financing, which has enabled the company to grow over the years.

• I am also proud of the agreements and financing that successfully launched our partnership with Geoff Shaw.

• Also important to me were the contributions I made to the Waikīkī Beach Walk® project.

• And last, but by no means least, I am proud of the Finance team, with whom I have worked over the years, who I believe are the best in Hawai‘i and in large measure responsible for the successes I have enjoyed.

Ruthann: You have been such a success in your chosen field of finance and at Outrigger. What have been your guiding values in achieving that success?

Mel: There are a few things that guide me.

• First, be fair in all of your dealings with folks. Our company’s reputation, which I believe is impeccable, has been built not only on our skills, which other companies have too, but on our integrity. We deliver on our commitments, and don’t shy away from them just because it is difficult – we “walk the talk,” so to speak.

• I don’t have a hidden agenda. I have always been and always will be upfront with no holds barred. While I have left much of my “New York” directness behind, I have not lost that intensity and candor and, when needed, I use them “Hawaiian style.”

• Accordingly, I am typically upfront with all constituents, in-house as well as external. I like to say, “The news is the news.” News doesn’t get better with age, so get it out there.

• I also believe in giving total support to my team. I often remind my co-workers that ultimately everything that comes from this department is my responsibility. I’m pleased to share the glory and happy to acknowledge the efforts of all who labor with me to make our department the success it has become.

• However, when “stuff” happens, it ends at my door. That is just the way it is for me. I have also endeavored to do the absolute best I can every day, some might say relentlessly.

• My “engine” works on two speeds – Full On and Stop. Thus far, I have not used the Stop mode. My wife, Malvina, often accuses me of being a “workaholic,” which I, of course, dispute. However, I do admit that focusing on getting the job done to the best of my ability is very important to me and always has been.

Ruthann: What will you miss most about Outrigger?

Mel: I will really miss the members of the Outrigger ‘ohana with whom I have had the privilege to work both here in Hawai‘i and throughout the Pacific.

Ruthann: What advice do you have for Outrigger employees in the future?

Mel: Above all else, don’t ever compromise your integrity.

Ruthann: What are your plans for the future?

Mel: Malvina and I intend to travel some and spend time with the grandchildren. We both want to learn to play golf. Our goal is to remain as active as possible, with our energies channeled in a different direction from what it has been thus far.

Ruthann: Please tell us about your family.

Mel: We have three children and five grandchildren. All of our children have advanced degrees and between them have logged an incredible number of postgraduate years and tuition dollars. Along that line, of the two who are married, their spouses have advanced degrees as well. I guess you could say that education is important to our family. Our grandchildren range from 16 months to a little over 9 years, and they all live on the mainland.

Thanks to his leadership, intellect, integrity, creativity and excellent relationships with our financial and other business partners, Mel has made major contributions to Outrigger’s exceptional success throughout his time with us.

Outrigger has engaged a national executive search firm to recruit a successor to Mel as Chief Financial Officer. Searches for someone capable of filling shoes as large as Mel’s can sometimes be short or can take six months or more.

I wish to add my personal thanks to you, Mel, for all the great things you have done for our company in these 19 years. It’s been a challenging but exciting time, and it has flown by. We’ll all look forward to keeping in touch with you and Malvina in the years to come.