Dramatic Jump in Runners for 40th Honolulu Marathon  
By Dr. Richard Kelley

Tomorrow morning, the biggest group of runners in 15 years will line up on Ala Moana Boulevard, just 'Ewa of the Ala Moana Shopping Center, to start the 40th running of the Honolulu Marathon! It is a milestone event in many ways.

The first Honolulu Marathon, in 1973, had only 167 entrants. But its popularity soared rapidly, and in 1995, it attracted a record 34,434 runners. In 1997, there were 33,682 entrants but since then the number has generally been in the mid-20,000s. For 2012, Dr. Jim Barahal, president of the Honolulu Marathon, is anticipating nearly 32,000 entrants, up around 40 percent over last year's 22,806!

Once again, the number of entrants from Japan is significant, with some 20,000 from that country registering as marathon runners or participants in the 10K walk. The sponsorship of the event by Japan Airlines, NTT DoCoMo, Sato Pharmaceuticals and Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG Card) is clearly an important factor in the popularity of the Honolulu Marathon in Japan.

The substantial increase in the number of participants is predicted to have a significant economic impact on Hawai‘i. The race will generate income on the order of $120 million, up dramatically over the estimated $107 million generated last year. Moreover, the economic benefits are not limited to Honolulu, but are spread throughout Hawai‘i since roughly one in every five out-of-state registrants plans to visit neighbor islands too.

Dr. Barahal is rightly proud when he points out that the Honolulu Marathon is self-supporting. Unlike some other major sporting events in Hawai‘i such as the Pro Bowl, the Honolulu Marathon does not ask for or receive any taxpayer support. It enlists private sponsors to help, and with registration fees, it pays for its operations, advertising and promotion, over 400 special-duty police, park use and cleanup, road barricading and cleanup, and the use of the Hawai‘i Convention Center.

Thanks to the large number of elite runners participating, the 40th Honolulu Marathon should be particularly exciting.

• The second-fastest marathoner in world history, Wilson Kipsang of Kenya, the 2012 Olympic Bronze Medalist, will be attacking the Honolulu course record of 2:11:12. While some of the world's “super-elite” runners are said to skip the Honolulu Marathon because of Hawai‘i’s heat and humidity, Kipsang decided to run here after the New York City Marathon – which he was favored to win – was cancelled, just 40 hours before the race was due to start, after Superstorm Sandy struck. Kipsang's 2:03:42 victory in Frankfurt in September 2011 is just four seconds behind the all-time world marathon record.

• Right beside Kipsang will be Kenya's Jimmy Muindi, who holds the Honolulu Marathon's record time of 2:11:12 and has won the race here seven times!

• Wearing Bib F1 will be Woynishet Girma of Ethiopia, who won the women's division last year with a time of 2:31:41.

• Svetlana Zakharova of Russia, a three-time Honolulu Marathon winner, once with a personal best time of 2:28:34, will try for her fourth win.

Elkanah Odembo, Kenya’s ambassador to the United States, will be a special guest in Waikiki to cheer on the large number of runners from his country.

Outrigger Hotels and Resorts and OHANA Hotels and Resorts are the Official Hotels of the Honolulu Marathon, and we proudly provide rooms for all the elite runners at Outrigger Reef on the Beach as our contribution to this important community event.

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According to General Manager Bill Comstock, the Reef is also hosting legendary long distance runner Frank Shorter, who won the marathon gold medal at the 1972 Olympics. Known as the “father of the American running boom,” he has run the Honolulu Marathon 19 times. Although he never won it, Shorter has been a champion of its reputation since 1974, acting as a race broadcaster and celebrity guest signer at numerous Honolulu Marathon Expos, according to www.honolulumarathon.org.

At the finish line, only a handful of competitors are hailed as winners, but in reality, everybody in Hawai‘i wins when the Honolulu Marathon races into town.

Thanks to Dr. Jim Barahal and all the staff and volunteers of the Honolulu Marathon for everything you do for our state year after year.