Thanksgiving 2013
By Dr. Richard Kelley

Thanksgiving is an American tradition, but it can be celebrated anywhere in the world. As our Outrigger ‘ohana counts its blessings this Thanksgiving weekend, we have much to be thankful for. In particular, we can be grateful for the continued strength of the hospitality industry throughout the Pacific region. The demand for travel has kept the “economic engines” of Hawai‘i, Guam, Fiji, Bali and Thailand rolling, stimulating these economies and creating many excellent job opportunities.

Many areas of the world have not been so fortunate, experiencing political unrest, civil wars, storms, terrorism, and social and economic troubles.

- The death toll from Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines now stands at 5,240 with 1,613 people still missing and 3.39 million displaced, according to the Wall Street Journal.

- Deadly fire from semi-automatic rifles and bombings has become a way of life in places like Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Afghanistan.

- Media commentators are chronicling economic difficulties in Europe and the challenges many European cities face in dealing with a rapidly growing population of often difficult-to-assimilate immigrants from Middle Eastern countries.

In the U.S., almost everyone is shocked as the realities of Obamacare implementation have become evident.

Pre-Thanksgiving travel in the U.S. was proving challenging due to the severe early-winter weather that is sweeping the country. Sleet, snow and freezing rain in the Midwest and the eastern states caused flight cancellations in many major cities. Many of our Hawai‘i guests checked in telling stories of delays and flight cancellations.

Thanksgiving is certainly a great American custom. See the sidebar article which touches on the history and traditions of this day. Like all cultural events, it has evolved greatly since it began, and it continues to change with the times. However, the core message of “giving thanks” for the blessings we enjoy still rings true, no matter where or how it is celebrated.

Here at Outrigger, this is our 66th Thanksgiving celebration, and every year there is reason to be thankful. This year, 2013, we have been extraordinarily fortunate and it is most appropriate that we pause and count our blessings. In addition to this year's business success, we have a wonderful ‘ohana, which now spans across half the globe. This is the nicest group of people you are likely to meet anywhere, and we work in a company that places employees first and prides itself on providing them with many opportunities to excel and grow. We are fortunate indeed.

I want to use this opportunity to personally thank every member of our ‘ohana for what you have accomplished this year. I wish you all a wonderful holiday season.

A C-17 US Air Force evacuation trip from Tacloban to Manila
The History of Thanksgiving

As every American schoolchild knows, we trace Thanksgiving back to the Pilgrims who, 392 years ago, after surviving the terrible winter of 1620-1621 at Plymouth, Massachusetts, sat down with their Native American neighbors to give thanks. The Pilgrims certainly had good reason to be thankful. In the previous winter, nearly half of them had starved or frozen to death or perished from disease. Things were looking up over the summer and fall as they refined their survival skills and, with the help of their generous neighbors, replenished their food supplies. How thankful they were to have a decent chance of surviving the coming winter!

Over the course of history, the reasons to celebrate Thanksgiving have evolved with the times. The early New England settlements designated Thanksgiving days somewhat randomly from year to year, when crops and weather were good.

During the American Revolution, the Continental Congress appointed one or more Thanksgiving days each year. In 1777, General George Washington proclaimed a Thanksgiving in celebration of a crucial victory at Saratoga, New York. In 1789, Washington, now the president of the new country, issued the first national Thanksgiving Day proclamation to celebrate the conclusion of the war for independence and the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

While today we celebrate for one day, centering around a special, celebratory meal often shared with family and friends, the Pilgrims celebrated with three days of feasting. The dates and length of celebration have seen surprising variation over the years. From the era of the Founding Fathers until the time of President Abraham Lincoln, each state chose its own date for the celebration. In 1863, Lincoln set the last Thursday in November as a uniform date, nationwide.

In 1939, during the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved the holiday forward to the third Thursday in November in an effort to extend the pre-Christmas shopping season and thus stimulate the economy, which was still suffering from the Great Depression. However, two years later, after much debate, the date was moved back to the fourth Thursday in November, where it remains today.

What Americans eat for Thanksgiving has also evolved with time. Today it just wouldn’t be Thanksgiving without turkey, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie. But the Pilgrims ate a very different meal — a smorgasbord of venison, clams, mussels, lobster, eel, beans, peas, corn, onions, squash, ducks, geese, wild turkeys and even swans! Notice that the bread, mashed potatoes, butter, beef, pork and sugary desserts were nowhere to be found!

Over our nation’s history, various types of activities have been associated with Thanksgiving. Originally, it was fundamentally a religious holiday with all members of a community, in their various churches and synagogues, giving thanks to God for their blessings. Many families today also give thanks to God with a prayer before dinner — on this day especially, if not all others.

In our nation’s early years, shooting contests were popular events as community members competed for bragging rights and perhaps a turkey or pigeon for the dinner pot. In some parts of the country, one can still find Thanksgiving “turkey shoots” today. The guns are real, but you’d be unlikely to find live birds used as targets.

Big city parades have been popular for many years. In the 1920s, city children would dress up in old, worn-out clothes, smear ashes on their faces and beg in the streets in “ragamuffin parades.” That practice has disappeared, but today the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City, with its enormous floating balloons, is televised nationally and has become such a tradition that many people think of it as the “Macy’s Day” parade.

Watching football and other televised sports such as college basketball, golf and auto racing has also become a centerpiece of many families’ Thanksgiving celebrations.

Perhaps the most unusual televised event today is the World Championship Punkin Chunkin (www.punkinchunkin.com) contest, a charity benefit for which teams gather in Delaware and compete to hurl pumpkins as far as they can with the help of some astonishing contraptions — catapults and pumpkin “cannons.” This year’s event, which actually took place November 1 – 3, brought out some 18,000 attendees and participants. The nationwide telecast took place on the evening of Thanksgiving Day.