



ISLAND MATTERS Mufi Hannemann

Hotel For Heroes Successfully Fulfills A Need

On April 6, Hawai'i Tourism Authority in partnership with Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association launched Hotels for Heroes, a statewide initiative to provide complimentary hotel rooms to medical professionals, frontline hospital staff and first responders. These rooms were meant to serve as a safe space for these individuals to not only self-isolate away from their 'ohana, but also decompress from the stress and rigors that have become the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since its inception, Hotels for Heroes (H4H) has allocated more than 2,500

room nights. The vast majority of these — roughly 81 percent — were utilized by medical professionals across the state. Other agencies that participated in the program included county fire and police departments, emergency medical services, state law enforcement and public transit operators.

The impact of H4H was immediately apparent. Maui Memorial Medical Center physician Art Chasen was profiled in a KHON2 News piece that reported the doctor, who was concerned that he may possibly infect his family, had essentially moved out of his home into an office space

where he had been sleeping on a mattress.

After enrolling in H4H, Dr. Chasen was provided a room at Maui Beach Hotel. He was quoted by KHON2 as saying: “(Hotels for Heroes) means a lot. It feels like you have some community support and that they’re understanding that you’re taking some risk to continue to take care of the community patients. They’re going to support you with that ... That’s a really good feeling.”

Meanwhile on O’ahu, Samantha Hamilton of Wahiawā General Hospital felt, “blessed” because H4H allowed her to “keep her family safe” by

spending her nights at a hotel.

One unforeseen and particularly gratifying side effect has been the grassroots community support that was generated for H4H. Multiple businesses and organizations volunteered their services or provided amenities to the heroes who were enrolled in the program.

Like any new initiative of this size and scope, H4H was not without challenges. At the onset, several groups missed the enrollment date and others were unclear on the eligibility criteria. Thankfully, the program was flexible enough to quickly accommodate these groups. This was never more

apparent than in the aftermath of the cluster of positive cases that occurred at Maui Memorial Medical Center. Hotels for Heroes was able to quickly provide 500 room nights for use by the hospital’s staff.

We officially stopped taking requests for rooms on May 18. Ultimately, we decided to conserve the remaining room nights for use in the event of a possible second wave of infections. While we are optimistic that these rooms will not be necessary, we thought it prudent to be prepared for this possibility.

As the sun sets on H4H, I wanted to publicly thank some of the key individuals

who made this program a success. These include Chris Tatum, president and CEO, Hawai'i Tourism Authority; Hilton Raethel, president and CEO, Healthcare Association of Hawai'i; Haley Hsieh, executive director, Laulima Data Alliance; all the sector point of contacts from government and labor; Mike Rompel, restaurant owner, Domino's Pizza Hawai'i; and Chris Sbarbaro, vice president of sales and marketing, external affairs, Enterprise Holdings Inc.

As always, please stay safe and continue to care for yourself and your loved ones.

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