last October, Hawai‘i Lodging & Tourism Association and Hawai‘i Tourism Authority partnered with Ho‘ōla Nā Pua to host the inaugural “Campaign for a Safer Community” symposiums, a series of free events on Kaua‘i, O‘ahu, Maui and Hawai‘i Island that featured panels of expert speakers who shed light on human trafficking, and on how the tourism industry taking advantage of its unique position can combat it. Representatives from the Department Homeland Security, as well as mainland experts and federal law enforcement agencies, led discussion panels that keyed in on the pervasiveness of human trafficking and how to spot and report it. One overarching message was clear — sex trafficking knows no boundaries as evidence of it can be found in many areas of our communities.

In the months since these symposiums, HLTA has worked to create a human trafficking disruption plan that I hope will serve as the catalyst that galvanizes our industry to do more to rid itself of human trafficking. Launched last month in conjunction with Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, the HLTA Human Trafficking Disruption Plan has four main focuses:

• Ho‘omākaukau — To make ready: Train hotel property staff on how to identify and effectively report suspected instances of human trafficking. Training should be mandated for front office, housekeeping and security employees.

• Ho‘ike — Display: Informative signage that details trafficking indicators must be displayed prominently in key areas that include the front desk; all housekeeping staff areas; and all security staff areas. Signage should also include clear methods of reporting.

• Ho‘okahua — To establish: Hotel properties must establish company-wide policies on how to address human trafficking. Policies should include a comprehensive code of conduct for employees, a zero-tolerance policy for any who engage in human trafficking or prostitution, and a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to report human trafficking.

• Ho‘ohui — To connect: Hotel management must connect and coordinate with local law enforcement to establish clear reporting practices. Hotel properties should utilize the National Human Trafficking Hotline (1-888-373-7888). You can read our plan in its entirety by visiting hawaiilodging.org/human-trafficking.html.

Human trafficking is also an issue that can be addressed legislatively. This year, there are numerous bills before the Hawai‘i state Legislature that aim to do just that. Of the many measures, there is one bill in the House of Representatives that stands out: HB 2062, which was submitted by Rep. Linda Ichiyama. This bill seeks to: establish a statewide coordinator and program within the Department of Human Services to address the needs of sexually exploited children; establish a statewide commercial sexual exploitation of children steering committee; establish a multidisciplinary team in each county to immediately respond to cases of sexually exploited children; and appropriate sufficient state monies for these purposes.

We will continue to monitor the progress of these kinds of legislation, and sex trafficking will be a major agenda item for our upcoming third annual Visitor Public Safety Conference on March 17 at Moana Surfrid-
Center Turns 40

My warmest congratulations to Royal Hawaiian Center, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. RHC and its employees are highly active members of our association. In addition to their participation in numerous HLTA events, Marleen Akau, general manager of RHC, and her team have been strong supporters of the Visitor Industry Charity Walk, sponsoring one of the most popular checkpoints.

For many years, RHC stood as a stark reminder of the heinous sniper attack that occurred in 1979 while it was still under construction. In the years since, RHC’s management team has made huge strides to rebrand itself into the bustling hub that it is today.

RHC now features a who’s who of retailers like Hermès, Apple and Fendi, as well as dining options that range from The Cheesecake Factory, Il Lupino Trattoria & Wine Bar to one of my favorites: Restaurant Suntory.

RHC has also established itself as an industry leader through its efforts to accurately and respectfully incorporate Native Hawaiian culture into all aspects of their operation. Director of cultural affairs Aaron Sala, cultural director Monte McComber and his predecessor Manu Boyd have all played outsized roles in accomplishing this, and have cemented RHC’s status as the must-visit attraction that it is today.