

WOMEN IN LODGING & TOURISM'S Laura Richards

WOMAN OF THE YEAR

The GM of Hanalei Colony Resort opened doors to victims of Kauai floods and to keep schools going

BY DAVID PUTNAM

As devastating floods roiled across the island of Kauai in April, Laura Richards flung open the doors of the Hanalei Colony Resort.

There was no water or electricity, but the resort's general manager, who had weathered Hurricane Iniki in 1992, assisted in the emergency "by housing disaster relief teams and doubling up as a distribution center for food and medical services," says Hawaii Lodging & Tourism Association President and CEO Mufi Hannemann.

Richards and the resort "became a beacon of light for their community," Hannemann told HLTA Kauai members in June.

Richards has been selected 2019 Woman of the Year by the Hawaii chapter of Women in Lodging & Tourism. The annual, hospitality-industry award goes to a woman with outstanding leadership in her profession and community.

She was with family "over the holidays in Placerville (Calif.), and was shocked and humbled when I received the call," she says. "I had tears rolling down my face, and my family thought something awful might have happened.

"Of course, when they heard the news we all started hugging and crying with joy. It is wonderful to be recognized, but I am only a conduit for the many people who are working hard to make a brighter future for Kauai after a very difficult year.

"Sometimes we have to make lemonade out of lemons, and that is exactly what is happening right now."

The recipient of the Woman of the

Tips for Success

Laura Richards, GM of Hanalei Colony Resort, offers advice for women interested in starting careers in the hospitality industry:

- Get an education in business and hospitality. If you can't afford to go to college, start with online courses.
- Never look at your job as just a job, but a part of your everyday life. We work eight-hour days (or more) and travel back and forth—it's a huge part of our day. So love your job.
- Be curious. Ask to move around in departments so you learn all aspects of the industry. Listen if you are asked to learn more, and take the challenge.
- Smile. You will feel happier.
- Work hard—it is more fulfilling.
- Look for ways to make a positive influence without complaining.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses.
- Surround yourself with people who fill your weak areas so you have a complete and positive team. Always be ready to accept that someone else may have a better idea.
- As you grow in your career, get a personal leadership consultant to help you understand your personality and where it fits in the hospitality world.
- Join an island chapter visitor bureau.
- Work with a terrific marketing and advertising team.

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