



ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

Improving Public Safety Among HLTA Priorities

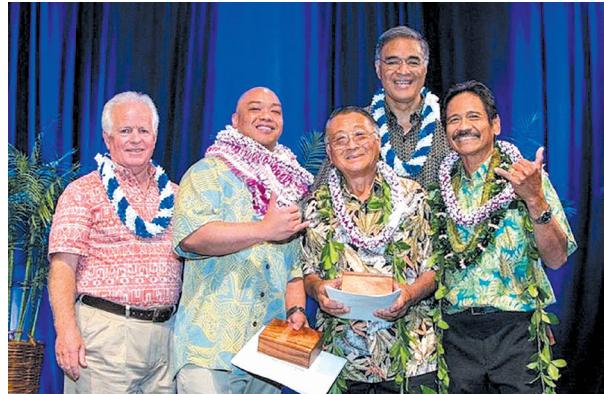
With the 2018 session of the Legislature in full swing, Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association is positioned front-and-center on legislation affecting tourism in general, and the hospitality industry in particular. Our priorities for Hawai'i's economic engine are fourfold:

Establish An Airport Corporation. An airport corporation will consolidate all airports now managed by the state government under a public corporation. Our airports make lasting impressions on millions of visitors and locals alike, and as such, this new entity can make the enhancements the airports need without the delays created by a large bureaucracy.

Even better, the airlines will help foot the bill for this corporation, not the public. We also believe that all those involved with the maintenance and improvements of our airports will achieve quicker and more efficient results.

A Level Playing Field. Another priority is the regulation of transient vacation rentals (TVRs). We're working with the Legislature and counties to create parity between traditional brick-and-mortar hotels and the short-term online rental market.

We believe the model adopted by San Francisco holds potential by ensuring transparency, openness and accountability for all businesses: requiring reg-



HLTA chairman Gregg Nelson poses for a photo with Na Po'e Pa'ahana finalists Branden Gaspar of Waikiki Resort Hotel, Clarence Yee of Mauna Lani Bay Hotel, the author and Juanito Tomas of Marriott Ko 'Olina Beach Club.

PHOTO COURTESY GREGG YAMAMOTO

istration, enforcing penalties and paving the way to start collecting taxes from the TVRs that are not paying. Left unchecked, our affordable housing problem will exacerbate, as it is increasingly clear that working-class families and neighborhoods have been negatively impacted.

Solutions To Homelessness. Over the past four years, HLTA and our members have raised well over \$2 million to relieve homelessness statewide. Last year, we helped pass a bill that would allow the state to distribute matching funds to agencies working with the homeless in tourism-impacted areas. Last session, it was held up by the executive branch because there were issues with the language that emerged from the Legislature. We'll seek passage of a similar bill this year with funds from the hotel room tax to help mitigate the homeless challenge that the state and counties continue to struggle with.

Public Safety. All it would take is some highly publicized crimes to harm our reputation as one of the safest destinations anywhere. That's why we are directing a laser-like focus on public safety across the state. We are working with stakeholders from the public and private sectors to organize a Visitor Public Safety Conference in late February.

We will be taking a page from the Visitor Crime Solutions Conference that took place in 1997 and will include input from partners such as Honolulu Police Department, Hawai'i Hotel Visitor Industry Security Association, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, the military and organizations dealing with juvenile groups and visitor safety.

Much like the 1997 conference, which led to the creation of the Waikiki Business Improvement District and the Ambassadors of Aloha, we plan on using this workshop to develop initiatives for us to act on or which need follow-up at the

legislative level at the state and counties with strong private sector participation.

Celebrating the Best

The HLTA celebrated its 28th annual Na Po'e Pa'ahana Awards on Jan. 11 by honoring the best-of-the-best of the hospitality industry. Na Po'e Pa'ahana, which means "hard-working people" in Hawaiian, is an apt description for the individuals selected for this honor.

Those who were recognized in eight career categories — led by Outstanding Lodging Employee of the Year Clarence Lee of Mauna Lani Bay Hotel, who has never missed a day of work in 38 years — were nominated by their hotel organizations for their exception-

al service to their lodging guests and contributions to their workplaces and communities.

Yes, the Hawaiian Islands have so much to offer: natural beauty, great weather, exceptional hotels and lodgings, a multicultural society, top-notch convention facilities, and more.

But it is the people of the visitor industry — the men and women who possess the professionalism, dedication, pride and aloha — who ensure that visitors return again and again to our islands, who make the Hawai'i experience a distinctive and memorable one for our guests.

Nearly a thousand employees, industry leaders, family members and others from across the islands gath-

ered recently at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort for the festivities. A big mahalo goes to emcees Howard Dashevsky and Marisa Yamane of KHON2, who did a stellar job.

In addition to the career categories, the hospitality industry bestowed honors on people and businesses for their service to the industry. This year also saw the introduction of a new award for community service by a hotel to recognize the philanthropy for which the industry is known.

For a complete listing of the winners and finalists, go to hawaiilodging.org/na-poe-paahana-awards.html.

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