



ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

Another Successful HLTA Charity Walk

Throughout the month of May, some 12,500 walkers on six islands united for the 39th annual Charity Walk, which over the years has become the state's largest single-day fundraiser by a not-for-profit organization. Held on three consecutive Saturdays on Hawai'i Island, Kaua'i, Lāna'i, Maui, Moloka'i and O'ahu, the Charity Walk is an opportunity for everyone in the visitor industry to show our gratitude to the people of Hawai'i for supporting tourism and a way for us to raise money to help so many deserving local charities.

Here are some fundraising stats: Hawai'i island (\$302,000), Kaua'i (\$277,000), Lāna'i (nearly \$34,000) and Moloka'i (more than \$38,000). Maui broke new records at more than \$1.1 million, and O'ahu tallied more than

\$480,000. This year's grand total of \$2.24 million (and counting) topped last year's record of some \$2.2 million.

What's special about the Charity Walk is that all the money garnered on that island stays in that jurisdiction. Not only that, but each of the participating islands puts its own spin on the event, serves its favorite 'ono kau-kau dishes and provides island-style entertainment to make it a memorable experience for all.

Every year, Kaua'i's walk gives out the "Golden Slippah Award" to the individual who gathers the most funds, and Lillian Watari of Hanalei Bay Resort took the coveted award for the fourth year in a row after raising more than \$17,000. On Maui, Westside Hoops captured the title once again for the nonprofit collecting the



More than 6,000 walkers get ready to take off at the O'ahu Charity Walk. Pictured are: (back, from left) Jared Higashi, Stephanie Lum, Guy Hagi, the author, Scott Ingwers and Alex Roth; (front) and Sam Kapu Jr.

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most money, with a whopping total of \$109,570. Hawai'i Island had a contest for best food booth utilizing local tomatoes. Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows copped the hotel division, while Romano's Macaroni Grill claimed the individual restaurant prize. Since its in-

ception, the Charity Walk has raised more than \$32 million.

And that's the next step in this Charity Walk process that oozes with chicken skin and goose bumps — when each island gets to actually dole out the funds in a special and touching ceremony

and sees the smiles and feels the warmth of the aloha spirit from hundreds of nonprofit agencies and organizations upon receiving their checks. Hawai'i Lodging and Tourism Association (HLTA) lives for these moments, which is why we say mahalo to all the volunteers, participants, sponsors and donors. 2018 will mark the big 4-0, and we already are making plans to make this upcoming "tradition of giving" the biggest and best one yet!

Save Brand USA

Recently, an initiative from President Trump's budget proposals affecting tourism brought a swift and rapid response from leaders of the hospitality industry throughout the nation because it called for the elimination of funding for Brand USA, the federally

supported, international travel marketing arm for the entire nation. This could prove to be a penny-wise and pound-foolish decision, given the visitor industry's huge contributions to the U.S. economy, to wit:

- Travel and tourism generates about \$2.3 trillion in economic output nationally
- The industry employs one in nine Americans
- In Hawai'i, tourism is responsible for 190,000 jobs in such industries as hospitality, transportation, retail services, food services and more

• Tourism in the islands generates about \$1.8 billion in tax revenues, about a half-billion of that via the hotel room tax

• Brand USA helped attract 4.3 million international visitors to the U.S., supported an average of 51,000 incremental U.S. jobs annually, and av-

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UFC In Hawai'i Has Big Benefits

eraged returns of nearly \$28 per dollar spent on marketing. (And I'm sure some of the president's many hotel and resort branded properties benefited from these foreign travel dollars.)

That's an impressive record for Brand USA, and it prompted Congress to reauthorize the program in 2014 and extend it to 2020. In this regard, a tip of the hat goes to one of our own, renowned chef and restaurateur extraordinaire and HLTA member Roy Yamaguchi, who was nominated by the late U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye to be a founding board member of Brand USA. Sen. Inouye was a strong supporter of Brand USA.

As former mayor of Honolulu and current president and CEO of HLTA, I have been a stout and longtime backer of public-private partnerships like Brand USA. In 2010, Congress voted to establish this vital public-private partnership for the nation's travel industry with strong bipartisan and industry support. It was a welcome development, as for years the U.S. travel industry had been at a severe disadvantage, as we were left to fend on our own while foreign governments invested heavily in their tourism marketing efforts. While Brand USA was relatively modest, it did help level the playing field for an industry that had lacked government support.

HLTA has joined our industry partners across the nation to implore our leaders in Congress to save Brand USA. This is a proven example of the public and private sectors working together to strengthen our economy, and it definitely merits continued support.

UFC in Hawai'i?

The dual success of featherweight Max Holloway in

earning his championship belt and welterweight Yancy Medeiros in scoring an impressive victory simultaneously in UFC competition in Brazil has prompted the organization to consider holding a UFC title bout in Hawai'i. That was quite a reception accorded to Holloway and Medeiros at the airport and along the Wai'anae Coast as they returned to a hero's welcome in their hometown.

A UFC championship match in Hawai'i would be an excellent example of the benefits of sports tourism. State tourism marketing officials need to seize the moment and capitalize on this opportunity to help lure a UFC title match here by developing a plan laden with reasonable incentives to convince the UFC to stage a major event here. This will go

a long way to also help sports fans forget the U.S. women's soccer debacle at Aloha Stadium and bungled attempts to keep the Pro Bowl and professional golf tournaments in Hawai'i.

I believe an earnest and creative pursuit resulting in a UFC title match in Honolulu also could foster a renewed commitment to broaden and intensify the state's sports marketing efforts, build and maintain venues to support a variety of activities (such as a new Aloha Stadium with the accompanying transit-oriented development benefits), and involve our local athletic community to give them more incentives to compete against the best from outside our islands.

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