

# MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

By Barbara Del Piano

*Editor's Note: Each month during the year 2000, writer Barbara Del Piano has highlighted a decade of the Club's history. In this installment, she writes about the period 1991-2000.*

To the right of the main entrance of the Outrigger Canoe Club is an inconspicuous bronze plaque. Installed more than two years after the completion of the new Club in the late sixties, the plaque was the brain-child of the Building Committee which expedited the construction of the new clubhouse and supervised the transition from old site to new.

It occurred as somewhat of an afterthought when the committee members decided that a plaque to mark the dedication was appropriate, and in fact, overdue. They wanted the plaque to express "the character, atmosphere and purpose of the Club," and they decided that it should be expressed in the imperative mood.

The committee met several times without success in an attempt to compose the wording for the plaque and finally assigned to Cline Mann the job of reducing to words the heartfelt sentiment of the Committee. Mann struggled with the project for several nights, but the words eluded him. Just when he was ready to give up, he remembered some reflections in Kahu Abraham Akaka's speech at the dedication ceremonies. Fortunately a copy of the speech was still in his files and he culled from it some of the inspirational thoughts that had been spoken that memorable day more than two years before.

With a little fine-tuning by the committee, the final version was agreed upon and the plaque was ordered. When it arrived several months later, arrangements were made to have it installed very early one morning, hopefully unnoticed, so that it might appear as though it had always been there.

The simple inscription is a combination dedication and mission statement that reflects in few and simple words the heart and essence of the Outrigger: "Let this be a place where man may commune with sun and sand and sea, where good fellowship and aloha prevail, and where the sports of old Hawaii shall always have a home."

Throughout the years, the plaque has gone largely unnoticed, but the sentiment expressed on it has remained the heart and soul of the Outrigger Canoe Club.

In 1990, the Club was 82 years old and had been at its present location for 27 years. It had weathered many storms, financial and otherwise; it had gone through the traumatic upheaval of a move to a new location, and it was now ensconced in its fourth clubhouse.

It had perpetuated many old traditions and established new ones; some of the familiar faces on



Senior Masters Macfarlane winners

the volleyball courts or the Snack Shop were third or fourth generation members, yet the overall face of the membership was more cosmopolitan.

The Outrigger was ideally located, financially sound, and diligently managed. It had a great deal to offer its members in all age categories and boasted an outstanding athletic program which included more than a dozen different sports activities.

Year after year its outrigger canoe paddlers led the growing field of participants in the busy schedule of regattas and long-distance races that made for an exciting summer and fall. Its volleyball teams competed in national championships year after year, never failing to win recognition for the outstanding players it had developed. Membership quotas were almost always filled with no shortage of applicants waiting eagerly to join. Sell-out crowds of members and their guests flocked to a myriad of social activities ranging from the ever-popular annual Luau and Christmas Open House to bridge games, barbecues and a variety of theme parties with clever motifs, creative entertainment, and delicious food.

The economic boom of the '80s had been good for the Outrigger - so good in fact, that in 1990 the Board of Directors decided to postpone a scheduled increase in dues. But good times quickly turned to bad early in the new decade when out of the blue, the Gulf War came along and the Japanese spending spree came to a screeching halt.

The impact of the economic downturn was felt by the Outrigger and other private clubs, and businesses. It was in fact the beginning of a recession that would effect the economy of the entire State for several years.

In his Treasurer's report at the Annual Meeting, George Cook's opening remark was "Nineteen ninety one was not a good financial year for the Club". This was a far cry from the Treasurers' reports of the eighties when the Club consistently surpassed its predictions by a wide margin. These were different times and the recession had a noticeable impact on both the Club's income and usage.

Treasurers' reports for the next several years would echo the same theme. Year after year the net operating income declined, delinquencies increased

and for a time guests and reciprocals were fewer.

With the sluggish economy and many prospective members feeling the pinch, there were fewer applications for membership. Although the Club remained in sound fiscal condition, it was as times hard pressed to meet many of its goals.

To make matters worse, an exorbitant and unanticipated hike in the real property tax assessment added to the concern. In addition to the sizeable increase in actual taxes, the increase posed the possibility of having a devastating effect on property negotiations with the Elks Club in the future.

The appraised real property value of the leased premises was \$15 million for 1990-1991, escalating to \$23 million in 1991-1992.

An appeal was filed resulting in a reduction to just over \$19 million. The appraisal was still considered too high and another appeal was filed. Eventually the evaluation was further reduced to 15 and a half million.

Ever conscious of the unpredictability of the future in regard to the land on which the Club was situated, a Building Fund had been established not long after the move to the new location. Funded by income from initiation fees and interest from its investments, the fund grew steadily over the years.

The hope was that it would provide enough money to buy the leased fee interest in the property, if and when it should become available, or to ease the impact of an increase in lease rent at the time of renegotiation in 2006. By 1990 the Building Fund had amassed \$3,646,700. By the end of the decade, this fund would stand at \$11,435,000.

Although it had been in existence for many years, the Long Range Planning Committee, headed at the time by Jason Oliver, was established as a permanent standing committee of the Outrigger in 1990 through a change in By-laws. It was fortunate that this plan and the diligent committee members who comprised it, was in place when the recession hit.

The Board of Directors assigned to the Committee the monumental task of developing a five-year plan for the Club that would be reviewed, updated and extended annually. As the first order of business, the Committee compiled a general outline by which to organize and initiate their plan.

They identified and prioritized the Club's general goals and objectives and proceeded to assess its operational and financial situation. Next, they devised strategies for accomplishing these goals and objectives. Working closely with management and the other committees, the Long Range Planners were able to help them in assessing their projected needs and incorporating them



# Outrigger Canoe Club 1991-2000

into a clearly established vision for the future.

What evolved was three separate subcommittees, each to deal with a specific area:

Building and Grounds/House;  
Operations/Finance; and Athletics. Each year the goals were reviewed and projected another year into the future so that at all times, the plan encompassed a full five year period.

The Plan has proven an invaluable tool in keeping the Club on a steady course throughout the years, despite the sluggish and unstable economy. Although there were times when goals went unmet, strategies were in place to compensate for shortfalls and no crises developed. The Outrigger's financial foundation was rock-solid and the envy of many other private clubs both in Hawaii and on the Mainland.

Several times over the decade it was necessary to raise dues and locker fees as well as food and beverage prices. But these increases were staggered so that their impact was minimal. A \$75 per quarter mini-charge was initiated in 1992 to help offset rising costs and lower income.

The long range plan addressed the condition of the physical structure that was now showing signs of age. By 1990 the facility was 27 years old and in need of a vast number of major capital improvements, far beyond the realm of regular maintenance.

Funds were earmarked and timetables were established to implement extensive renovations in practically every area of the premises. A major commitment was made to ensure that the quality of life at the Outrigger would continue to meet and surpass the expectations of its members.

By 1992 the first phase, a major facelift of the business office, was completed. Perhaps the major undertaking was the total refurbishment and redecorating of the Dining Room, renamed the Koa Lanai, which necessitated closing down the food operation in that area for several months.

The Hau Terrace did double duty during this period and everyone felt that the inconvenience, however slight, was well worth the outstanding result.

Other improvements continued as scheduled, culminating in the complete renovation of the kitchen and replacement of outdated equipment, making it truly a state of the art facility. Even the most conscientious planning however, could not cover every contingency so that when Hurricane Iniki headed toward Oahu on September 11, 1992, there was a great deal of hurrying and scurrying to batten down the premises and prepare for a possible calamity. After securing all furniture and beach equipment, the Club was abandoned to face the onslaught of the storm since Civil Defense authorities had ordered the evacuation of all buildings in Waikiki within 300 feet of the shoreline.

Fortunately, damage to the actual structure was minor and in the aftermath of the raging tempest, the biggest job consisted of clearing tons of sand, coral, rocks and debris that had been dumped onto the beach, Hau Terrace and Snack Shop areas. At the height of the storm, water ran into the base-



ment of neighboring San Souci and flooded the transformer vault, blowing all the transformers and causing an electrical outage in the entire area that lasted for nearly 24 hours.

After all was said and done, Iniki, while wreaking havoc on many parts of Oahu and devastating Kauai, had no lasting impact on the Club, except to make it vividly aware that next time, it might not be so lucky.

During the 90s, Outrigger won the Macfarlane Regatta five times, tied for first once, and took second place honors four times. The paddlers also had an outstanding record of wins and near wins in all the canoe regattas, long distance paddling events, swimming, kayak and paddleboard races. Outrigger teams won the United States Volleyball Association Championship four consecutive years and members turned out in droves for the Honolulu Marathon and other running competitions.

In 1995 a change in management occurred when John Rader was selected as the Outrigger's new General Manager. He brought with him an abundance of experience, enthusiasm and energy. Before long, the dismal financial picture began to brighten. Despite the still poor state of the economy, Rader found ways to cut costs and raise income without compromising the quality of the overall Outrigger experience.

Another major change occurred when, after serving the Club for over 30 years as chef, William Teruya retired and was succeeded by Manfred Pirscher whose creativity and innovativeness brought a new look and taste to the dining menu.

The '90s saw great strides made by women of the Outrigger. In 1998, Mary Philpotts McGrath became the first woman to be elected President of the Outrigger. Paula Crabb had broken the barrier when she was selected in 1986 as the first wahine Club Captain in the Club's history. Liz Perry



Diane Stowell

Dugan and Tiare Richert Finney took on this tremendous job in 1992 and 1999 respectively.

In 1991, the "Winged O" consisted of only 29 members. The all male organization, established in 1968, was comprised of outstanding athletes who had made significant contributions to the Club over a long period of time. In a monumental break with tradition, Diane Stowell was inducted as the first woman into that select group. In 1996, that exclusive honor was awarded to Paula Crabb.

Perhaps one of the most spectacular Outrigger parties of all time was the New Year's Eve party of 1999. The event was sold out nearly a year in advance as members and guests chose the Club as the place to say goodbye to the '90s and greet the new century and new millennium. It was a dazzling affair, the air vibrating with a special aura that only such a once-in-a-life-time event can create.

It was indeed a special occasion for each and every person there. The esprit de corps that manifested itself throughout the evening continued into the wee hours of the new century. The event was also a celebration of the Club itself. . . as this 92-year-old organization passed another milestone in its illustrious history.

It was a tribute to the scores of dedicated men and women who had guided it through prosperous and perilous times. . . to those who had given unselfishly of time and talent to serve on the Boards of Directors and the many committees that make the Club function . . . to the stalwart and dedicated men and women who trained and coached and encouraged others to do their utmost best. . . to the thousands of members who, over the years, paddled their hearts out to bring victory to the Outrigger . . . to the volleyball players, swimmers, surfers, runners, kayakers, paddleboarders and other athletes who brought fame and esteem to the Club . . . to the members who supported the Club by their patronage and allegiance . . . and to the host of loyal and dedicated employees, many of whom spent their entire working careers at the Outrigger, who made the Club run smoothly and efficiently and added their own special brand of aloha.

It was a tribute also to the steadfastness of the organization, that throughout the years and the changing times, remained true to its mission that the Outrigger Canoe Club be "a place where man may commune with sun and sand and sea, where good fellowship and aloha prevail, and where the sports of old Hawaii shall always have a home."

Next month: Members who have made a difference.