



**Full House**  
2020 Hawaii Convention Center bookings approach 400,000  
BY BRETT ALEXANDER-ESTES

**T**en Orton, general manager of the Hawaii Convention Center, doesn't look like a hostess with nearly 400,000 guests on the way. She's beaming.

While some Spring 2020 events have been cancelled for 30 days, starting March 30, to follow the COVID-19 precautionary guidelines provided by the state of Hawaii and public health organizations, Orton is looking forward to continuing scheduled city-wide and locally focused events as health and safety measures permit.

"We regret any inconvenience this may cause to our clients and guests, and we look forward to a robust schedule of city-wide and local events for the remainder of 2020," she said in a statement in mid-March.

Still, she notes, "we're super excited" about the remainder of the 2020 schedule. "We are seeing a slight drop in attendance numbers from offshore events that are cancelled, but nothing alarming yet."

Given Orton's success in securing larger and more varied bookings since she became the HCC's manager a few years back, some enthusiasm is in order.

"This year in 2020 we have over 10 offshore or city-wide conferences, large conferences, with over 4,000 delegates," she says. "Some of the big ones are Rotary International (28,000 expected attendees) and National Letter Carriers."

Courtside thrills are also in store. The Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) is adding new events to its roster of annual high school basketball and volleyball qualifying tournaments. Approximately seven to nine of these events—AAU tournaments as well as competitions sponsored by other athletic organizations—are booked at the HCC in 2020. One is the Pacific Rim Championships 2020 in July, with 2,500 expected.

AAU's Hawaii tournaments, an early Orton initiative, just makes sense, she says. "My vision was, if you're going to Detroit for a qualifying tournament, why wouldn't you come to Hawaii and turn it into a family vacation?"

"It's funny," she smiles, "you find a lot of families come and drop their kids off (at the center) and then go off and come back when they know their kid is going to play."

For other groups, the Hawaii Convention Center is equally magnetic. "I think our location certainly is a benefit for us," Orton says. "I know a lot of meeting planners who (book) business on the West Coast or the East Coast usually sacrifice attendees from Asia, because it's so far."

Planners like those who book Hawaii for the first time, she says, "have been really, really happy with their choice. Because they find their attendees from Asia have tripled." Scientific and medical conferences in particular, she says, are booming.

The Hawaii Convention Center also supports Hawaii's hospitality industry at the grass-roots level. ClimbHI, a Hawaii-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit that encourages students to finish high school and advance to post-secondary education or employment, holds its main Oahu Leadership Exploration Inspiration (LEI) event at the HCC each year.

The Hawaii Convention Center anchors new towers springing up along Kapiolani Boulevard. PHOTO COURTESY DAVID CORNWELL.

Julie Morikawa, ClimbHI founder and president, says this event and similar programs throughout Hawaii host hundreds of high school and college students each spring. Due to COVID-19 precautionary measures, she says, spring 2020 LEI programs will be postponed to the 2020-2021 academic year.



During the Oahu event, students are hosted for site visits at partner hospitality companies throughout Waikele, such as hotels and restaurants, to explore career opportunities. When they return to the HCC, Morikawa says, they network with educational institutions and businesses, and typically connect with approximately 100 peers and mentors in all occupations—police, firemen, doctors, lawyers, you name it—"who share their stories and contact information. For students looking to build their network, Morikawa says,

### By the Numbers

- Some of the Hawaii Convention Center's biggest 2020 bookings to date include:
- 3,000 IMMUNOLOGY 2020 TM** (May 8-12)
- 28,000 Rotary International (June 1-3)**
- 2,500 Pacific Rim Championships 2020** (July 3-5)
- 6,500 NALC 2020 Biennial Convention** (Aug. 10-22)
- 3,000 PRIME 2020 (Oct. 2-4)**
- 14,000 The International Chemical Congress of Pacific Basin Societies 2020 (Dec. 15-20)**

With thousands of Hawaii Convention Center bookings scheduled for 2020, "providing a safe environment for our clients, visitors, guests and staff is our top priority," HCC General Manager Teri Orton said in a March open letter. The Hawaii Convention Center, Orton said, is closely monitoring COVID-19 developments and enhancing cleaning and sanitary measures throughout the facility.



Chris Tatum, Hawaii Tourism Authority president and CEO, addresses a "Train the Trainer" session for CTE's Hospitality Pathway Service Excellence Certificate developed by ClimbHI. PHOTO COURTESY CLIMBHI.

### A New Pathway to Success

Hawaii workforce development nonprofit ClimbHI in January launched a new Hospitality Pathway Excellence Certificate for high school students under a statewide contract with the Hawaii State Department of Education (DOE), and with support from the Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA).

The Certificate curriculum was exclusively developed in partnership with the School of Hotel Administration at the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business, one of the world's leading hospitality administration programs.

The curriculum is part of the DOE's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. After completing it, students will receive a Service Excellence Certificate of Achievement from Cornell University and the HTA.

The program will be available for CTE students starting in the second half of the DOE's 2019-2020 academic year.

"You've now got a whole new akua here to help you."

In addition to ClimbHI and other outreach—the Heʻoʻomaʻomaʻi Conservation Program, the Hawaiian Legacy Restoration Initiative and Sunset Male celebrations, among others—the HCC expects to attract Kapiolani Boulevard's revitalized neighborhood as new towers like Sky Ala Moana and Mandarin Oriental open their doors.

"We are pleased to have additional options for our guests so close to the Hawaii Convention Center, adding to the tens of thousands of rooms available in 'Waikiki,'" Orton says. "The ability to offer such a diverse array of lodging options is one of the reasons the center is such a desirable destination for so many major conferences from around the world."

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