

Harbor improvements remain vital

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



As Maui loses a cruise ship, some use this opportunity to question needed expansion at Kahului

Harbor and the

value of the cruise-ship industry overall. While the questioners may not even consider this a loss, the Maui Chamber of Commerce certainly does.

Removal of Norwegian Cruise Line's *Pride of Aloha* ship brings the cruise-ship visits to Kahului Harbor that were once at six days a week down to just one day a week. The loss of cruise-ship days began when the *Pride of Hawaii* was pulled from interisland service and put into service in Europe. Now the *Pride of Aloha* will be transferred to Star Cruises, reflagged and deployed to Asia this summer.

According to NCL executives, they have been challenged by foreign-flagged cruise ships that have driven down prices in the market. While we understand this tough business decision by NCL, we see

this development as a significant loss. This industry has helped the economy and was seen by economists as an undertapped industry that presented significant market opportunities for local businesses.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce supports the continued development of the cruise industry in Maui County — an industry that has added another stream of visitors to our islands. Further, our support includes the improvement of harbor facilities at both Kahului and Lahaina harbors.

Therefore, we believe that the cutting out of this ship neither warrants reduced support nor is cause for changing the 2030 Kahului Harbor Master Plan, as some have suggested. This master plan is meant to address and encompass current and future needs and uses — including further development of the cruise-ship industry and tackling critical congestion and safety issues.

The plan is being presented at a time when we have widespread support from the governor and members of the state House and Senate to modernize and upgrade the harbors in Hawaii, with Kahului Harbor slated to get the lion's share (\$345.1 million) of the \$842 million projected in the statewide

harbors-modernization plan. With this level of support, the time is ripe to get the advancements critically needed at our very constrained harbor.

For us, the issue of modernizing harbors is a top priority. While other Neighbor Islands have more than one commercial harbor, Kahului Harbor is Maui's only one, and it is the busiest of all Neighbor Island harbors. Our demand already exceeds our pier-and-yard space, and passenger-and-cargo traffic must be separated. The harbor is already extremely overtaxed, and our growth projections continue to soar, with Maui County's population expected to increase by 49 percent by the year 2035, to 207,000 residents.

Protecting surfing and canoeing uses at Kahului Harbor has been and continues to be an important point in the discussion when addressing needed improvements. In these discussions, great efforts are made to protect these uses as much as possible, while meeting enhancement, safety and growth objectives, and dealing with resource limitations, such as money and time constraints. Financial resources are not infinite, other alternatives will cost substantially more, and this will be a challeng-

ing budget year. Thankfully, legislators see the need to improve Kahului Harbor as a priority.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce also supports a second commercial harbor. However, we understand that renovation of Kahului Harbor is long overdue, we have a unique opportunity to get within six years the upgrades we have been requesting for a number of years, and another commercial harbor would take decades before coming on line. Improvements to Kahului Harbor are important not only to businesses but to all residents. If we don't increase the capacity at this harbor now, it will drive up the cost of living and strain the economy.

Our mission is to advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, and to advocate for responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics. Therefore, we continue to support the cruise-ship industry, along with the Kahului Harbor 2030 Master Plan, as an important component of our visitor industry. One setback, from the loss of the *Pride of Aloha*, is not changing those positions.

■ *Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.*