

THE OFFICE OF SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

The Twenty-sixth Legislature with all of its newly elected and re-elected officials, will open on the third Wednesday in January 2011. With the economy as a key concern, one of the ideas I have for stimulating it is through creating an Office of Sports Development. The objective of the Office of Sports Development would be to attract and promote sporting events here in the islands, from amateur youth sports to professional, big stakes competitions.

Sports is big money and it can bring healthy capital here into our islands. When sports events come here, we benefit in many ways – publicity, increased hotel occupancy, direct spending on meals, goods, and services, as well as charitable fundraising.

Hawaii is ideal because of its year-round warm climate, sunny weather, range of terrain, and calm waters. We don't have to invest huge sums into infrastructure. The amiable Pacific waters that surround our islands have previously hosted training for the America's Cup yacht race. Among the fishing tournaments in Hawaii are the World Cup Blue Marlin Championship, the International Billfish Tournament, and a couple of dozen others. Charter boat skippers can accommodate fishermen from out of state who want to reel it in with the best of them. Hawaii is one of the ultimate surfing spots on the big, blue planet, made famous not just by virtue of awesome curls on the North Shore, but also by the Beach Boys long ago and many surf films since then.

Next week's world-famous Honolulu Marathon is a prime example of how much of an economic impact large sporting events can have. About three-fourths of the roughly 20,000 runners each year are from out-of-state. That's a lot of visitors staying in our hotel rooms, eating at our restaurants, shopping for souvenirs, and going sightseeing. Event promoters say that each year the marathon generates roughly \$100 million in total sales. It boasts one of the highest participation numbers in marathons in the U.S.

Kailua-Kona's Ironman World Championship on the Big Island is thought by some to be the most exciting triathlete competition in the world. Viewed as the defining race for the sport, tens of thousands vie for a prized spot in any of the qualifying events around the globe. Of this elite group, only the top 1,800 vie for the title. The Ironman challenge includes a 2.4-mile swim, followed by a 112-mile bike course, finished up by a 26.2-mile run. How prestigious is Hawaii's triathlon? It has been described as the Super Bowl, Wimbledon, World Series, World Cup, and Tour de France all rolled into one.

For those super-fit who want to experience the thrill of doing a triathlon but can't train full-time, Oahu offers the Tinian Triathlon, which hosts 1,200 athletes each summer on Oahu. For the adventurous, there's the Kilauea Volcano Marathon with its lava terrain in sections interspersed with the Big Island's lovely forests and grueling slopes. The "Marathon and Beyond" website puts the Kilauea Volcano Marathon as its choice for 10th best among marathons because of the Big Island's exotic scenery. Here's a description that's hard for athletic tourists to resist: "a race

in a remote wilderness area that is one of the more scenic in the country....the desert surrounding the volcano...climbs to the summit through the rain forest....[where] you are soothed by wild orchids, wild ginger, and huge palms."

The global publicity from sports events is extremely valuable. The Aloha Stadium has played host to the Pro Bowl for 30 years, and after this year's hiatus, returns to Hawaii in 2011 and 2012. The stands are full of fans, as are the hotels and rented cars, who watch the best of the best of professional football stars. The worldwide TV viewing audience gets to see scenic shots of our state before, in-between plays, and after the show, giving our state great publicity.

The Sony Open also brings great recognition to Hawaii. Held in January each year, the contest brings 144 of the world's greatest golfers to the Waialae Country Club. Event hosts estimate that the golf tournament is watched in over 450 million homes in more than 200 countries, and that it contributes approximately \$100 million in marketing and economic impact to Hawaii. As one of the most global events on the PGA Tour schedule, the international talent combined with the spectacular beauty of Hawaii's golf courses attracts visitors to our islands. Whether they come to watch the tournament in person or at a later time on vacation, we are happy to have them enjoy our islands and spend their money here.

Our non-profit sector can benefit as well as the commercial sector. Funds raised by the Sony Open provide funding for more than a hundred charitable organizations who receive a share of the \$1 million raised annually.

Hawaii's entrepreneurs also get a share of tourism spending. Former America's Cup challenger the America II, offers three sails daily to those who want to experience the thrill of riding on an actual championship contender. Sailing out of historic Lahaina Harbor on Maui, riders on the America II can enjoy the exhilarating feel of the refreshing ocean spray and cool breezes as it speeds through the channels among Maui, Lanai, and Molokai, courtesy of our tropical tradewinds. Diving companies can also offer year-round escapades into our warm, blue seas for a close-up view of Hawaii's colorful, unique fish and sea creatures. Hawaii is a natural for skydiving and parasailing, with our glorious mountain ranges and nearby blue seas.

How about indoor sports such as billiards, badminton, or ping pong? Let's not forget youth sports such as the AYSO, Pony League, Little League, Broncos, Diamond softball, volleyball, basketball, or tennis. With year-round beach weather, wouldn't it be great if the US Olympic Beach Volleyball team could train here?

The athletic competitions that are already held here have infused millions of dollars into our local businesses. The potential economic boost of hosting even more sporting events looks promising, and I think Hawaii is best served by actively attracting this sector. I hope that as the bill to create the Office of Sports Development moves through the Legislature, you will join me in supporting it.