

Denise BRITO

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IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR DENISE BRITO TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION on her colleagues at the Maui Coast Hotel where just a couple weeks ago she began as Director of Housekeeping.

It started with a simple flower she likes to wear behind her ear.

"This one is a Plumeria," she said explaining that she picks whatever is in season. "I pick a flower for me, and I'll pick a couple extra. So, on my first day I had a couple extra, so I gave them to the ladies at the front desk." The next day she brought more and by that afternoon, her team was requesting them. "It's something I enjoy doing. It doesn't cost me anything but time, and it just brightens everyone's day."

It's an extension of what Denise sees as the Hawaiian spirit. "It's sharing with people and getting to know people for who they are. I like to find out if you're married, how long have you lived here, what you like to do on your days off. I might know your family; your family might know me. Sharing the aloha spirit is being open, smiling and welcoming people."

Hawaii is unmistakably a big part of who she is. "I'm born and raised on Maui. My family has been here for generations," she said. "I come from a very large family. My family on my mom's side is Portuguese, my dad's side is Hawaiian." Though Denise's immediate family isn't very big—she's the middle child with a younger brother and an older sister—her grandmother on her mother's side is one of 21 children. "And then my husband is the oldest of six. I have a ton of nieces and nephews," all of which she said requires that Thanksgiving and Christmas take place over multiple gatherings.

Denise and her husband Hoolulu (a Hawaiian name that means calm protector) have two boys. The oldest is 32 years old and lives on Maui. "He was a Christmas baby. Born on Christmas Day," she said. Their younger son is 26 and he lives in Las Vegas.

Denise has been working in the hospitality industry since around 2010. Prior to that she was a branch manager for a title and escrow office. Before coming to work at the Maui Coast Hotel, she'd eaten at its restaurant and was happy that the Kihei Caffe was now on site. "I actually know the owners and a couple of people that work there," adding a rave review for its cinnamon rolls.

Outside of work she loves spending time with her husband and traveling to Texas, their favorite place to visit, as well as Washington and Oregon. Denise explained that her passion is construction and building things, and that the couple's tools are as much hers as Hoolulu's. The couple is heavily involved with their church where they've been members for more than 20 years.

Although Maui is known for its beaches and ocean, Denise explained that while she loves its beauty, "unfortunately as you can tell with my skin, the beach and the sun does not love me back. So even though I'm born and raised here, if I go in the sun, I will get red as a lobster, then my skin blisters, then it peels, and I come back to the same exact color. I will take an afternoon nap over going to the beach any day."

Denise has a big job on her plate. Her department is comprised of 50 team members and more will be added when the new tower opens in Spring of 2024. But her relationship with her team and knowing she has a positive impact keeps her coming back with a smile. "Knowing that I made a difference throughout the day, it fulfills me that evening. I just rest and know that tomorrow's a whole new day to accomplish new things."

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