

Green Lodging Conference brings change to hotel business

By Linda Fine Conaboy

Hilton Hotels is changing the way it does business because of a green lodging conference in South Lake Tahoe.

Will something that significant happen at this summer's conference? Only time can answer that question. But those putting the Aug. 22-25 seminar together are aiming for big things.

"It'll be a larger conference coming off the momentum of last year," Bill Cottrill, director of sales and marketing at Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe said. His property, which is part of the Hilton family, is hosting the second annual West Coast Green Lodging Conference like it did last year.



Hilton Hotels
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properties.
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The meeting is aimed at hotel general managers, chief

engineers, innkeepers and owners.

“There’s a lot of enthusiasm. Last year many corporate folks learned a lot; this year they want their entire team here,” Cottrill said.

He pointed out that the cost, about \$300, is not much for a conference, especially for one where attendees can learn such things as how to begin and implement a green program, why going green is valuable and even how the community benefits.

“They definitely got their money’s worth last year,” said David Hansen, engineer at the South Lake Tahoe Embassy Suites. “If they implemented just one or two things, the pay back could be in just a couple of weeks. Just simple things like changing light bulbs. If they took just that one idea back, it was more than worth the price of admission.”

Hansen says attendees will also learn about waste reduction and recycling, food waste composting and compostable products, all of which will be on the agenda in August.

Hansen said he received feedback from Embassy Suites in San Luis Obispo that has realized savings in its energy costs as well as the Hilton Chicago where all of the food waste is now being composted. The Hilton website reveals the chain is the first in the world to earn LEED and Green Seal environmental certifications.

“My hope this year is that someone who was at the last conference can speak about how they’ve instituted sustainability at their property,” Hansen said.



David Hansen

So dedicated has Hilton become to implementing sustainability within their brand, they developed, tested and last year officially unveiled LightStay, a proprietary system developed to calculate and analyze the environmental impact of Hilton Worldwide's 1,300 properties using the system. Results showed enough energy was saved to power 5,700 homes for a year, while enough water was conserved to fill more than 650 Olympic-size swimming pools. In addition, these properties reduced carbon output equivalent to taking close to 35,000 cars off the road, all of which resulted in an estimated savings of more than \$29 million in utility costs in one year.

Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe is participating in LightStay.

"We are able to benchmark ourselves against other Hilton Properties," Cottrill says, adding that Lake Tahoe is No. 1 within the Embassy brand and No. 5 in electrical efficiency for the entire Hilton organization.

Always conscious of additional ways to add to their property's sustainability program, Cottrill and Hansen ticked off a number of programs implemented there. Here are a few:

- A computer system designed for the automated control and monitoring of the heating, ventilation and lighting needs of the buildings.
- All 400 suites have programmable occupancy sensing thermostats.
- The hotel is testing "Green Switch" in a few suites to

pinpoint the return on investment on this device designed to save energy consumption by turning off the power to certain outlets (like the TV) and lighting when guests leave for the day.

- Replacement of 165, 40-watt incandescent exit lights with one watt LED light.
- Replacement of 80 garage lighting fixtures with LED lighting.
- Removal of over 300 unnecessary lights.
- The use of only compostable, plant based plates, cups, spoons, etc. in food take- out facilities.
- Ozone laundry systems.
- Collecting and re-selling recyclables such as cans and bottles.
- Promoting zero waste events.

In addition, Embassy Suites has formed collaborative relationships with South Tahoe Refuse and Full Circle Compost, a company producing organic compost and soil nutrition needs in Minden.

“It probably will never end,” Cottrill says. “Our green efforts have brought us some business we wouldn’t have had. Sustainability is now at the forefront of many meeting planner’s minds,” he says. “It’s not just money you can save from the program; it’s top line revenue (money to be made), whereas bottom line savings is the profit from changing your efficiencies—very simple things.”

“You never stop,” Hansen said in regards to being green enough.. “People ask me all the time, ‘when will you be finished going green?’ The answer is never. It’s a lifestyle change. I come up with new ideas all the time. Employees come

up with new ideas—it's endless.”

For details about this year's green conference, go online.