

Greener Than Ever

By Karen Kornelsen

THE hospitality industry in Canada is going green. In the past five years alone, the industry's attitude towards sustainable business practices has gone from simple conversations to wide-spread innovative advances and programs. Cascadia Hotel & Suites in Vancouver, BC, managed by SilverBirch Hotels & Resorts, was the first hotel in Canada to adopt a 100 per cent Zero Waste Policy in 2009 and the results are inspiring.

Judy Adams is the general manager of Cascadia Hotel & Suites and is also the former managing director of the BC Partnership for Sustainable Tourism Society (operating at ETHOS BC), a not-for-profit society that works to ensure the environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability of one of the province's largest sectors. ETHOS provides tourism businesses with the tools they need to incorporate sustainable practices which are measurable yet practical. Adams is also a member of the Canadian Sustainable Tourism Advisory Council.

The Zero Waste program at Cascadia Hotel began as a pilot project in May 2009, through a partnership with Wasteless Environmental Services, to look at ways Cascadia could reduce their carbon footprint.

"The process of implementing this program has been a great learning experience for our team at Cascadia and an educational experience for our guests," says Adams. "We are recycling 100 per cent of recyclable items and the remaining waste is made up of combustible items only, like wood and plastic. We no longer send waste to the landfill. The combustible waste goes to the incinerator to produce energy."

In every guest room at Cascadia, there is a garbage bin, a recycling bin and a composting bin which they refer to as an "organic tote". After collecting the waste from each room, Wasteless removes all the separated waste from the property.

"We definitely needed a partner in ensuring waste is removed from the property in the same fashion in which it was broken down in the hotel to maintain the integrity of the program," Adams says. "We regularly go through program audits conducted by Wasteless Environmental Services to understand what areas we are having issues or success with. It's a big responsibility to ensure it's maintained." As a company standard, SilverBirch Hotels & Resorts conducts regular environmental audits to ensure each hotel is making the necessary progress toward maintaining healthy buildings.

The feedback from hotel guests has been extremely positive, says Adams. "Like all human beings, some are more interested or focused on sustainability than others. Those that are committed to environmental stewardship in their own homes look for these initiatives in the hotels that they stay in," Adams says. "We've got comments from guests that really appreciate the Zero Waste program and the efforts of our employees. This is why the industry is spending more and more time on how systems can be improved, because it's not just coming from management and colleagues, it's coming from the customer as well."

Adams, who has been a veteran hospitality executive throughout Canada and has made hospitality her career, is excited that the industry has come this



In-suite waste containers at Cascadia.



Receiving Bar at Cascadia.



Cascadia Hotel & Suites.



In-suite tent cards at Cascadia.



Smart Hotel Solutions

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DL Leslie, director of branding and media relations at Siemens Canada, says, “Green initiatives and environmental sustainability plans are now standard parts of major hotel marketing strategies. New hotel construction is now looking to achieve some level of LEED (Leadership in Engineering and Environmental Development). As a result, a higher level of technology is needed to meet expectations on environmental sustainability.”

Leslie says Siemens has a very intelligent “Hotel Solution” in place in Europe where they offer an integrated solution. “Smart Hotels” can fight climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

“In essence, intelligent hotel solutions integrate the hotel customer database with the building automation and security systems,” says Leslie. “As an example, room lighting, heating/cooling, TV, etc. will only be activated at check-in or if the hotel room access card is inserted into a card reader inside the hotel room. As a guest leaves the hotel room, removing the card from the reader will make all systems go back to standby, therefore maximizing energy use.”

Leslie also says that because hotels have very unpredictable occupancy levels, varying day-to-day and room-by-room, energy savings can be substantial when smart hotel solutions are implemented.

Siemens’ environmental portfolio consists of products that span the entire energy value chain—from power generation and distribution to the efficient use of energy in both commercial and residential applications. It also offers effective means of environmental and climate protection as well as cutting-edge technology for water management and air pollution control.

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far, especially considering that five years ago, the conversation was just beginning.

“I think our industry is ready and wanting to commit to more sustainable business

practices, not just environmentally, but socially, culturally and financially as well,” she says.

“Five years ago, it started to become part of the conversation. Although other industries,

especially those that have a direct impact on the environment, were making great progress, the hospitality industry was just starting to talk about how to move forward with their efforts. Individual businesses started to recognize that to a whole generation of colleagues and future leaders in the industry, environmental stewardship was extremely important.”

It was just a few years ago that towel exchanges were implemented in hotel rooms, new linen cleaning policies were introduced and recycling started in operational and/or guest areas of hotels as an industry standard.

“Where that was leading edge as far as procedures go, now it has become the norm. Where we’re going now is really taking a look at how we’re recycling on a larger scale, organics, ensuring we are reducing the amount of plastic being used, ultimately reducing our overall carbon footprint,” says Adams.

According to Adams, conversations are now being held at the managerial and corporate level. At the various companies she has worked with, she has seen a continued focus on new and innovative ways to become more environmentally conscious. These efforts benefit the organization from a financial standpoint, as well.

For businesses that are looking to become more environmentally conscious, Adams says they should start by putting together a group of interested and committed people from all levels of the organization. Commitment from upper management and good communication is key.

“Businesses also need to understand that there’s a business function to these sorts of initiatives and an understanding of the ability to invest money and the return on investment is important,” says Adams. “Put in place programs that have been tried and true in other hotels and restaurants. Start with that, see the benefits and then try more innovative solutions. Once the financial outcomes come from those first systems, like more energy efficient lighting, you’ll see the benefits.”

The hospitality industry is a service industry that is all about the people. Adams says that customers, colleagues and owners all recognize there is a responsibility to not only provide a product that is keeping with the values of the industry’s consumers, but that is environmentally and socially conscious as well.

“Sustainability is an area every human being is becoming more conscious of every day,” says Adams.

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