

Earth-Friendly Hospitality

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Famous author and educator Christina Baldwin once said: “When you are stuck in a spiral, to change all aspects of the spin you need only to change one thing.” Although she wasn’t addressing corporate hoteliers spinning out of control with waste, it’s something that’s been taken to heart by Fairmont Hotels & Resorts. Only they’ve gone way beyond changing just one thing: they’ve changed their entire approach to the environment and waste management.

Back in 1990, the company decided to create an environmental stewardship program here in Canada. Over the years, it’s been fine tuned and is now incorporated in 52 hotels in 14 countries. It’s a model for energy conservation, water management strategies and building partnerships.

For example, Fairmont Hotel & Resorts is working with the global conservation organization World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and has set a world-class CO2 reduction target for this summer. That will qualify it to be part of WWF’s elite Climate Savers program.

“Climate change is such a pressing issue. You can’t have an environmental program unless you have a program to reduce your footprint,” says Michelle White, director of Environmental Affairs for Fairmont Hotels & Resorts.

Even simple things like switching from regular light bulbs to energy efficient lighting or serving pitchers of water instead of bottled water at meetings makes a huge difference. “It has the potential to enhance your brand value and identity but it also has a strong ROI, in a short payback period,”

says the corporate environment guru.

White also points out that clients are getting savvier by the minute.

Many are jumping on the green bandwagon with environmental mandates of their own. So, as a natural progression in its environmental plan, Fairmont created Eco-Meet, a program that helps planners host green events in a responsible fashion.

In the process, staff are having fun by embracing the program with passion and pizzazz. For example, Ryan Dunne, executive chef at the Fairmont Algonquin in New Brunswick is constantly coming up with innovative ways to run in the green lane. For instance, Dunne and his colleagues recently welcomed a queen bee and her colony to the hotel. “The bees will feast on lavish gardens from the hotel’s front lawn and from Kingsbrae Gardens, the 27-acre masterpiece next door,” says chef Dunne. And all the hotel’s kitchen

scraps are composted for Kingsbrae instead of going to the dump.

Even simple things like offering Yoga or Tai Chi sessions along with a low cal “smoothie” during breaks instead of coffee and donuts indicates a mental shift. Menu choices highlight seasonal, local, organic ingredients and the purveyors who produce them. Local wines feature prominently on the wine list. Teas and coffees are Fair Trade products.

Sous-chef Thomas Canning chimes in from the Fairmont Newfoundland: “Environmental considerations are becoming more integrated into our decision making process.” Anything that cannot be re-used in the kitchen is used in the staff café, sent to food banks or the Iris Kirby House (a women’s shelter that the hotel supports through Fairmont’s “Adopt a Shelter” initiative).

“We also champion the cause of wildlife preservation and partnered with Salmonier Nature Park to help preserve the Pine Martin (a threatened species). With each green initiative, the hotel does more for sustainability in the community,” Canning says. Other coups include diverting over 1 million pounds of materials from the landfill.

Some employees, like Mary Butler, take the green ball and run with it. Butler has worked at The Fairmont Newfoundland for more years than she cares to divulge. The former seamstress (now banquet gal) was branded the “Queen of Green” because she recycled all kinds of housekeeping, laundry and linen items that the hotel would normally throw out.

Butler has made dry cleaning and garment bags from discarded sheets and turned old tablecloths into napkins. She transformed discarded hotel uniforms into costumes for local playhouses. But her most memorable undertaking was to fashion a “wow” quilt, made of pieces of recycled uniforms for a 47-year laundry retiree. The retiree had seen many different styles and sizes over the years, and had washed more uniforms than anyone could count. There wasn’t a dry eye in the room when the retiree was presented with the gift.

Not only is the Fairmont family doing something right, but they’re sharing their environmental story with the world by selling copies of their award-winning Green Partnership Guide for \$45 (environment@fairmont.com). In case you are wondering, the guide is printed using environmentally friendly waterless printing process, on Rolland Enviro100 paper (100 per cent post-consumer fibers), is EcoLogo and Forest Stewardship Council certified, processed chlorine-free and made with biogas. How’s that for walkin’ the talk?

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