

Let's Talk Green

So you've made the commitment to embrace sustainable business practices at your resort—a significant and admirable step. It's likely an excellent business move as well. Let's talk about how to go green.

According to Amity Lumper, senior associate for sustainability specialists Cascadia Consulting Group, Inc., guests today are giving priority to green accommodations. Greener operations mean a greener bottom line, and the media are publishing stories on these businesses nearly every day.

"The world of communications has changed dramatically in the recent past, particularly with the invention of social networking Web sites," says Lumper. "Guests talk to other guests, rate their favorite green hotels, and visit green travel Web sites for recommendations for their next getaway."

Lumper offers a word of caution, however, noting that it's not enough to merely recycle at your resort. Green is much more all-encompassing, from building energy performance to water efficiency to reduced packaging to green cleaning practices. This means you have to take it seriously: develop a policy or mission statement, educate your employees, and be authentic about areas where you can improve.

"After all, guests can now access your resort's green record at the click of a mouse," notes Lumper. The point: if you say you are green, "walk the walk." If the commitment is not real, people will take note.

"I feel there has been a lot of lip service to 'going green,'" says Margit E. Whitlock AIA, principal, Architectural Concepts, Inc. "If your resort is not 100 percent committed to completely changing the way it operates, then your watered-down green efforts demonstrate a lack of integrity, and

very soon the public is going to see right through all the hype."

Tips for Change

Whitlock identifies communication, education, and teamwork as critical to a successful sustainability program.

"What people cannot see, touch, or smell, they dis-count," she says. "The major energy and sustainable systems are those you cannot see, and they affect a number of areas, including energy consumption, waste and water management, solar control systems, mechanical systems, lighting controls, employee rideshare programs, work from home programs, and more. We need to move from the unconscious to conscious application of sustainability. This will take everyone participating in the process—developer, architect, designer, contractor, operators, guests, and employees."

The management team of ILX Resorts has looked to participation in outside organizations as part of a commitment to sustainability. The company is a major supporter of the non-profit Institute of EcoTourism located adjacent to its Los Abrigados Resort in Sedona, Arizona. The mission of the Institute is to promote environmentally sensitive travel to the many visitors to the area.

"We find that guests participating in the informative, entertaining sustainable programs we promote are increasingly green-savvy and are seeking ideas and knowledge that make a difference on vacation and at home," says Nancy Stone, vice chairman and president of ILX Resorts. Stone also serves as chair of the new ARDA Greening Task Force.

While general good practices are expected and even demanded today, owners need to be prepared to save

the earth with their pocketbook. This point should be incorporated into your communications process.

"Sustainability efforts do not come cheap, and I doubt they have been foreseen in reserve studies completed 20 years ago," says Whitlock. "In fact, I would say the same for five years ago."

"We encourage lodging clients to communicate with guests about the positive impact they are making on the environment and for future generations," Lumper says. "We also suggest providing incentives to guests who take green actions, such as discounted parking rates for hybrids or a discounted rate for rooms with green features."

Case Study

Let's look at an industry player that really does walk the walk: Breckenridge Grand Vacations. The company recently published its annual *Recycling Program Report* for its existing Colorado properties: Grand Timber Lodge, Gold Point Resort, and the Breck Inn.

The company's commitment is evident in the 2007-2008 report, which showed that Breckenridge Grand Vacations recycled 84,000 pounds (or 42 tons) of newspaper. This is equivalent of saving 714 forty-foot fir trees; 294,000 gallons of water; and 126 cubic yards of landfill. The company's efforts also resulted in the recycling of 30,000 pounds (or 15 tons) of aluminum and steel cans, which is equivalent to saving 35,250 gallons of gasoline. In addition, 190,000 pounds (or 95 tons) of glass was recycled, at an equivalency of 950 gallons of gasoline and 351.5 cubic yards of land fill. Over 22 ½ tons of plastic were also recycled—the energy equivalent of lighting 22 homes for a year. In total, Breckenridge Grand Vacations'

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Operations

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recycling program prevented 175 tons of glass, plastic, paper, and metals from entering landfill in the past year. This was a 10 percent increase over the year prior.

"We are committed to doing the little things that add up to a big impact," says Mike Millisor, president of Breckenridge Grand Vacations. "Our goal is a corporate culture that supports practices that preserve and protect our environment through the participation of all departments."

What else has the company done? Last year, it introduced the use of fluorescent light bulbs at Grand Timber Lodge, Gold Point Resort, and the Breck Inn in all bathrooms, can lights, and hall lights, resulting in a savings of 84 percent in electricity. In addition, the company now purchases wind source credits to replace energy produced by conventional electrical power plants for their corporate offices. Its resorts

feature automatic shut-off small appliances, such as coffee makers and irons. Guest bathroom amenities like shampoo and lotion are biodegradable, and the housekeeping and maintenance departments also use biodegradable cleaning and laundry products. To cut down on emissions, Grand Timber Lodge guests enjoy a complimentary round-trip shuttle service to in-town locations.

Breckenridge Grand Vacations' new resort, the Grand Lodge on Peak 7, is the culmination of the company's green efforts. Even during construction, there are massive efforts to be as environmentally friendly as possible. A recycling program at the construction site has resulted in recycling and reusing on-site boulders, all steel scraps, most plastic, cardboard, wood, and drywall. The actual resort will be constructed from materials that have a maximum 10-year harvest cycle. Building materials will be brought in from within a 500-mile radius whenever possible. (See the sidebar on p. 45, in the feature

story of this issue for an extensive list of other sustainable elements.)

Breckenridge Grand Vacations communicates all these green product updates and practices to owners via monthly newsletters and e-news, so guests then feel good about responsible vacationing.

"The United States accounts for five percent of the world's population but uses 25 percent of the world's natural resources," notes Millisor. "We as a company can feel good knowing we are doing our part to reduce this number." ■

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The Greening Task Force

Recognizing that the world is becoming more sensitive to environmental issues, including sustainability and the need for new and different ways to cut down on waste or unfriendly environmental practices, ARDA's Board of Directors approved the formation of a Greening Task Force, and ARDA Chairman Jon Fredricks appointed Nancy Stone, president of ILX Resorts, as chair.

The goals of the task force are threefold:

- To identify consumer-friendly opportunities where conservation and greening touch the timeshare consumer, such as recycling in the units, environmentally friendly housekeeping options, and other opportunities to be more sensitive to the environment and sustainability.
- To identify and then publish best practices in the "greening" arena—many resorts and hotels have had initiatives in conservation, water use, waste controls, landscaping, and building design that address a

sensitivity to natural resources and sustainability. After looking at these best practices, the committee would recommend which ones are publishable for ARDA to promote to the entire membership.

- To identify areas that either the state or federal government have or may have an interest in regulating that would mandate greening practices, in the hopes that by identifying these areas, the industry could work to institute some voluntary guidelines, making mandates less necessary or compelling for government.

In an effort to help facilitate the creation of a list of Best Practices for the vacation ownership industry, ARDA has created a Web blog. Direct access to the blog and documents contained therein are password protected.

To gain access or share information on best practices, please contact Sam DePoy, vice president, ARDA Federal & Regulatory Affairs, at sdepoy@arda.org.