GREEN MEETINGS
ADD NEW DIMENSION TO THE PLANNER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP

BY CATHLEEN HAGAN

fertile
GROUND
Crystal Mountain Resort has earned steward status in Michigan’s Green Lodging program.
UNLESS YOU’VE BEEN STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND, you probably know that green meetings and events are, well, growing. In Michigan, they’re just starting to take root, and the seeds are being sown by planners and suppliers working together, sharing ideas, information on products and practices, instituting new programs and choices. Whether the planner requests it or the supplier suggests it, when meetings and events go green everyone wins.

Venues lead the way
Although venues are always updating and renovating, they tend to be reactive, responding to demand as trends become evident (think waterparks). But in the case of green meetings, venues are at the forefront.

Last year, Crystal Mountain in Thompsonville became the first ski resort in Michigan to use purchased wind energy credits to power their ski lifts, but did you know they also offer carbon offsets? Tell them your number of attendees and how far they will be driving, and a program computes how much carbon your event will use. Planners then gave attendees the option of buying carbon offsets, funds that go towards programs that reduce CO2 emissions.

At Western Michigan University’s Fetzer Center, environmentally-friendly products, including green cleaning supplies, Cool Carpet, GREENGUARD™ furniture, and sofas from a company committed to recycling, were an integral part of recent renovations. “Our goal is to create more awareness that the Fetzer Center is purchasing in areas that focus on green meetings,” says Connie Peruchetti, CMP, account executive.

In Frankenmuth, “We haven’t had as many requests from planners to focus on more green services, but I’m sure it’s only a matter of time,” says Joanna Morris, CMP, director of sales at the Bavarian Inn Lodge.

That doesn’t mean they’re not being proactive. Following a conference held by the Michigan Association of County Clerks, Mary Hollinrake sent a letter to the Lodge praising them for replacing bottled water with pitchers, recycling cardboard boxes and asking guests to use fewer towels. “Your parking lot lighting should be held up in the enviro world as a model for controlling light pollution,” wrote Hollinrake, county clerk/register of deeds with Kent County.

Lodged in memory
As testament to the increased consciousness of green meetings, both the Michigan chapter of Meeting Planners International and the Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) recently held programs devoted to the topic. Yet Tara Wolicki, CMP, director of legislative affairs and special events for the MSAE, had never heard of the Green Lodging Michigan program. The voluntary program establishes environmental guidelines for the hospitality industry and recognizes those facilities that meet certain levels of compliance.

“Michigan has one of the best green lodging programs in the country,” says Ray Burger, a former hotel general manager who founded Pineapple Hospitality, a distributor of environmentally sensitive products to the industry, based in St. Charles, Missouri.

To date 16 Michigan facilities have become certified or are in the application process (see sidebar for a link to the list). “This is probably the fifth conversation I’ve had this week,” says Bryan Foster, rooms manager at Stafford’s Perry Hotel in Petoskey, the first facility to earn “Leader” status. “We’re extremely proud of efforts like in-room recycling bins and using fluorescent light bulbs to reduce energy consumption.

So, are planners specifically choosing venues that have gone green? “At this point, we have not had that response,” says Peruchetti. Foster says it hasn’t happened yet at the Perry Hotel, either, but “once we mention it they’re interested.”

Sharing is caring
It’s exactly this kind of information exchange between planners and suppliers that is driving greener meetings and events in the state.

“(Angela Keller-Pelc, group and sales representative at The Henry Ford) made the suggestion” to feature a menu of all locally grown organic produce at the MSAE annual awards banquet in September, says Wolicki. “It was fantastic, the best food we’ve ever had.”

Suppliers aren’t the only ones making the overtures. Hollinrake suggested in her letter to the Bavarian Inn Lodge that the air conditioning could be raised a degree or two to save energy. Earlier this year, John Forte, president of Forte Belanger in Troy, hadn’t heard of eco-products like SpudWare™ (biodegradable cutlery) until a client suggested it. Now he’s a green pro, thanks to clients like Chrysler.

“They came to me,” says Forte. “General

WHAT IS A GREEN MEETING?
According to the Green Meeting Industry Council, a green meeting incorporates environmental considerations throughout all stages of the meeting in order to minimize the negative impact on the environment.

38 MME | Michigan Meetings + Events | WINTER 2008
GREEN MEETING RESOURCES

As the consciousness of green meetings has grown, so have the number of online resources available. Here are a few.

GREEN MEETINGS INDUSTRY COUNCIL
Source for the seminal report “The Future is Green: Charting a Sustainable Future for Meetings.”
www.greenmeetings.info

MEETING STRATEGIES WORLDWIDE
Try the demo version of MeetGreen®, a line of tools for green meeting guidance.
www.meetingstrategiesworldwide.com

THE CONVENTION INDUSTRY COUNCIL
Click on “special projects” then “green meetings” for the CIC’s green meetings report, including best practices.
www.conventionindustry.org

CARBONFUND
Everything you want to know about your carbon footprint. Also has a carbon calculator.
www.carbonfund.org

GREEN LODGING MICHIGAN
For a list of Green Lodging Certified hotels and B&Bs in Michigan.
www.michigan.gov/greenlodging

BLUEGREEN MEETINGS
Another great site for green meeting tips.
www.bluegreenmeetings.org

Motors as well has been pushing a green agenda for some time.” At a recent event for 480 interns, Forte provided box lunches that used unbleached paper and no plastic products.

“We have had some requests for eco-friendly items,” says Diane Villeneuve of Starline Promotions in Southfield. “We have gotten quotes on these products and will be keeping them in mind for the future.”

The Cost of Green
Does going green mean spending more green? In some cases, yes. Purchasing carbon offset credits is an additional line item. Villeneuve notes that eco-friendly products do cost more, and Forte concurs. “They cost almost twice as much,” he notes. “But I have a feeling we’ll see prices come down as there’s more competition in the marketplace. When we use these products for larger corporate events, I tell clients to keep in mind when using disposable items we can send less trash, reducing the overall cost.”

Venues like the Perry Hotel and the Fetzer aren’t charging more for the privilege of using a green facility, and Wolicki says there was no extra cost for the green menu at The Henry Ford. Of course going green can actually save money, too, through practices like not using bottled water, going paperless and reducing energy consumption.

“It’s not just the cost,” says Foster. “We’re doing it because it’s helpful for the environment.”

WMU’s Fetzer center features environmentally friendly furniture and carpeting.

* GET CONNECTED

CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN
Thompsonville / 800.968.7636
www.crystalmountain.com

FETZER CENTER
Kalamazoo / 269.387.3232 / www.wmich.edu/fetzer

BAVARIAN INN LODGE
Frankenmuth / 888.775.6343 / www.bavarianinn.com

MICHIGAN SOCIETY OF ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES
East Lansing / 517.332.6723 / www.msae.org

PINEAPPLE HOSPITALITY
St. Charles, Missouri / 636.922.2285
www.pineapplehospitality.net

STAFFORD’S PERRY HOTEL
Pentwater / 800.737.1899 / www.staffords.com

THE HENRY FORD
Dearborn / 313.982.6220
www.thehenryford.org/catering

FORTE BELANGER
Troy / 248.288.3300 / www.forbelanger.com

EXCELLENT PACKAGING & SUPPLY
Richmond, Calif. / 800.317.2737
www.excellentpackaging.com

STARLINE PROMOTIONS
Southfield / 888.571.STAR / www.starlinepromo.com

Visit the link below for a great interview that asks the question “Can meetings and events ever really be green?” www.eventsreview.com/news/events/604