



TORONTO THE GREEN

BY SHERRYLL SOBIE

The city's hotels and convention centres lead the way in environmental stewardship.

How much waste do you think 3,100 delegates would typically generate over a four-day conference? According to a recent Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) newsletter, it's about 90,000 cans or bottles, 75,000 cups, 87,500 napkins and 62,500 plates. Add organic, textile, wood and other miscellaneous materials and the tally would amount to a whopping 16,016 metric tonnes of waste – all headed for the dump.

But it doesn't have to be like that. PCMA's annual January meeting, held at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre (MTCC), was the largest-ever zero waste convention that MTCC is aware of, says John Houghton, vice-president, sales and marketing. Yes, you read that right: zero waste – nada, nil, zip, zilch. The 16,000-

plus metric tonnes of waste materials mentioned above were diverted from landfill via recycling and composting.

And that's not all. Turtle Island Recycling, a Toronto-based, multi-material recycling/waste removal company involved in the conference, says PCMA's and MTCC's efforts saved 57 trees, approximately 75,000 L. of water, 39,310 kilowatt hours of energy, 16,200 L. of oil and 77 kg. of air pollutants.

How exactly did they pull it off? According to Vince Quattrociocchi, MTCC vice president, operations:

- Styrofoam products were replaced with recyclable paper products.
- Waste bins were removed, leaving three recycling options: paper, drink containers and organic waste.
- Leftover food was donated to a local

food bank or composted.

- Turtle Island Recycling posted trained staff on loading docks to monitor materials. All output was placed in clear plastic bags to ensure proper auditing.
- MTCC staff were trained on zero-waste policies and procedures.
- PCMA encouraged attendee participation in depositing recyclables into clearly marked bins.

PCMA president and CEO Deborah Sexton says in order for a meeting to be truly sustainable, a partnership must be struck between the facility and the customer, to make sure everyone is on the same page and that the message gets out. "Then the message needs to be repeated constantly," she says.

For their part, PCMA disseminated information via pre-conference newslet-

ters and again, during the event, through stage announcements and handouts in registration packages.

It's a shared, single-minded approach. "Toronto was very proactive," she says. "They came to us to help them promote zero waste. They were wonderful, a really good, tight-knit community to work with. Doing a zero waste conference might not be so easy in other locations."

Sexton's sentiments are echoed by Laurie Simmonds. "Toronto is one of the greenest cities in North America. It's easy to have a green event here," says the president and CEO of Green Living Enterprises, a Toronto-based company that specializes in event management, publishing and consulting.

This past spring, Green Living Enterprises produced The Green Living Show, Toronto's first consumer event dedicated to "all things green." The three-day event, which attracted approximately

20,000 attendees, was held at The Direct Energy Centre, located on the CNE Exhibition grounds. "It was quite deliberate to be at a green building and one that is accessible by public transportation," says Simmonds.

"Our environmental programme is two-pronged," says Laura Purdy, director of sales and marketing, Direct Energy Centre. "We conserve energy and we create it through innovative green technologies ranging from a complete lighting retrofit to photovoltaic panels and a wind turbine. Direct Energy Centre's food and beverage department has recently replaced their plastic disposable dishes with new, fully compostable (corn-based) dishes, cutlery and drinking cups. The compostable dishware can be recycled as part of the green-bin organics programme in the building."

Across from the Direct Energy Centre sits The Automotive Building. The 78-

year-old, architecturally significant structure will be renovated and expanded to provide 160,000 sq. ft. of high-quality ballroom and meeting space, due to open September, 2008. Purdy says they are targeting a LEED Gold rating for the space. LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a recognized system that follows set criteria for determining a building's level of environmental achievements.

"We are looking to operate the centre in a green way," says Purdy, "and to construct it in a green way with low-volatile, organic-compound carpets, non-off-gassing paint, and installation of CD TVs to eliminate the need for traditional paper signage."

The Green Living Show built upon the Direct Energy Centre's green offerings and added a few of their own: Energy supplied by Bullfrog Power (the first 100 per cent green electricity retailer in



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Ontario), and instead of bottled water, the show partnered with the city's water department, providing a trailer with drinking fountains. They even had green giveaways: Seed paper – flower seeds mixed into biodegradable paper, which could later be planted – used for tickets, badges and bookmarks.

The mandate to be as green as possible was imposed on the exhibitors, too. "We worked with the exhibitors to make sure they were authentic. No green washing," says Simmonds. Green washing – a term used to describe a company that falsely portrays itself as environmentally friendly – is a concern in the corporate world, including the meetings industry.

How do you know for certain that a property or meeting venue follows green procedures?

Shawna McKinley, Vancouver-based executive director for the Green Meeting Industry Council, says to ask pointed questions about a property's environmental initiatives, then see it with your own eyes. "Request a back-of-house tour," she suggests. "How is waste handled? Is there a sorting area? What is the staff doing? Where does the waste go?"

GREEN BOUTIQUE HOTELS

The Gladstone Hotel

- Guestrooms are cleaned with green products and stocked with all-natural, local amenities.
- The kitchen offers organic field-to-table produce and fair-trade organic teas.
- An extensive recycling and composting program.
- Is a member of Green Tourism Association and Green Enterprise Toronto and is audited by Green Shift, a Toronto-based organization that helps businesses implement environmentally responsible practices.

The Cosmopolitan Toronto Hotel and Spa

- State-of-the-art technology that saves energy on lighting, water pressure, heat and air conditioning.
- A mechanical system doubles the volume of fresh air circulation.
- All suites feature top-of-the-line air purifiers.
- The Shizen Spa features a waterfall and "living garden wall" – a vertical garden that releases oxygen into the air, bringing the outdoors inside, revitalizing the spirit.
- During construction, the exterior walls of the hotel were infused with granite to encourage optimal energy flow throughout the building.

Pantages Suites Hotel & Spa

- All suites in the hotel feature windows that open, for increased air circulation.
- Currently in the process of converting suites to laminate hardwood flooring, to reduce allergens.

Hôtel Le Germain

- Executive chef David Chrystian says he strives to produce a menu consisting of sustainable, local and indigenous fare.



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One of the hotel's most exciting endeavors is the 4,000-sq.-ft. rooftop herb garden, where they grow 20 varieties of herbs. "The roof garden cuts out the packager and the transporter. And, of course, we can offer our guests fresh, organic, authentically local herbs," says Coates.

What you *don't* see may be as important as what you do see. A case in point: the Delta Chelsea hotel. They don't have blue bins in guestrooms, but they do a stellar job in recycling with two on-site compactors – one for landfill and one for recycling – located in two separate areas to prevent contamination.

"Removing blue bins was a housekeeping decision to cut down on clutter," says Dan Morin, director, property maintenance and chair, environmental committee. "We are implementing an educational DVD (available on a designated Green television channel) that will explain our system to guests," he adds.

McKinley also recommends being explicit with your requirements. "Get it in writing, have an environmental clause in

the contract. It can be really detailed, addressing issues like air pollutants, water consumption and carbon footprint."

For planners new to the green scene, this may sound like a lot to ask. "We always encourage people to consider and implement what works for you and your clients. If you're just getting started, think of it like the low-hanging fruit scenario," says McKinley. "Just pick what's easiest, and build on your success with each meeting."

Anthony Watanabe's Toronto-based company, Innovolve Group, specializes in event management and sustainability consulting. He recalls the first green conference Innovolve organized, an Energy Conservation Summit, held in 2005 at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, in Toronto. Watanabe made the process easier by choosing the Fairmont Royal York, a leader in environmental practices. "It was a good start to choose an environmentally responsible location," he says.

The landmark hotel, which received the Reader's Choice Award for Service Excellence by *M&IT* for the fifth consecutive year, is an industry leader in the "Three

R's" (reduce, reuse and recycle), with a total waste diversion rate of 67 per cent.

"We are setting a standard in the industry, and through that, others will catch the spirit. Any hotel that does not recycle is in the dark ages," says Melanie Coates, regional director, public relations and chair of the hotel's green committee.

The Fairmont Royal York has implemented conservation strategies in steam, water and energy. They also donate untouched muffins and croissants to Second Harvest, a local organization that delivers fresh food to those in need.

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In planning its first green conference, Innovolve Group also produced a sustainability statement which detailed the steps taken to mitigate the group's environmental impact. "It got good response," Watanabe recalls. "It functioned as a promotional and educational tool and helped to increase buy-in."

Innovolve Group has continued to produce a sustainability statement for every successive event. And with every event, the green offerings grow.

"Still, we get taken to task for not being green enough." Like the time they served water in plastic bottles instead of jugs. "We learn from each other," he concedes. ■

– Sherryll Sobie is a Toronto-based freelance writer and photographer.

PLANNED BUILDS AND EXPANSIONS

- **Hazelton Hotel and Private Residences:** A nine-storey, five-star hotel in trendy Yorkville, slated to open August, 2007, with 77 rooms and 16 private residences.
- **Ritz-Carlton Hotel & Residences:** First 20 floors of the 53-storey building will feature 267 hotel rooms and is due to open in 2009. It will include an energy-saving, deep-cooling system.
- **Trump International Hotel & Tower:** The 57-storey luxury building will have 260 rooms and 109 condominiums. There are plans to connect it to the PATH underground walking network.
- **Shangri-la Hotel:** a 65-storey condo-hotel set to open in 2011. The first 17 floors will consist of guestrooms; the remaining floors will be condo suites.
- **Toronto Congress Centre:** The latest expansion will bring trade and convention space to over one-million sq. ft. and incorporate green energy, water conservation and boost indoor air quality.