

The background of the entire page is a vibrant green with a pattern of overlapping leaf silhouettes. A large, detailed green maple leaf is positioned in the bottom left corner, partially overlapping a light green circular shape. The text is centered within a white rounded rectangle in the upper half of the page.

# GREEN MEETINGS

A SUSTAINABLE WORK  
IN PROGRESS

BY LISA PLUMMER

**There seems to be no stopping the green movement in the meetings and events industry.** With more companies seeking to be identified as socially responsible and organizations adopting sustainability as part of their new culture, meeting green not only makes good environmental sense, but also good business sense for the industry as a whole. Now more than ever, meetings destinations, hotel and convention properties, and industry organizations are gearing up for the future, and that future appears to be a bright shade of green.

### CITIES JUMPING ON THE (GREEN) BANDWAGON

When you think green destinations, you probably picture model cities such as San Francisco, Portland and Seattle, communities that have established strong infrastructures for supporting sustainable practices, which extend to their convention and hospitality industries. With progressive recycling, energy conservation and waste management programs, cities such as these appear to have little difficulty attracting the environmentally conscious meeting planner.

Yet, as more and more organizations select sites for their events based on a city's level of green practices, destinations are recognizing that they'd better start thinking and acting green or lose potential business. As a result, several cities across the country are working harder than ever to put green practices in place and get the word out that environmental stewardship is important to them, too. Here are just a few cities that have taken some recent strides in sustainability.

Virginia Beach, Va., is a city that aspires to be green through and through. Named the first "Virginia Green" destination in the commonwealth by the state's Virginia Green environmental program, the city's sustainable centerpiece is the Virginia Beach Convention Center (VBCC). Built green from the bottom up, the almost 3-year-old facility is pursuing LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver certification, which it hopes to achieve by the spring of 2010.

Upon completion, the facility will be the first LEED-certified convention center on the East Coast, joining an elite group of six convention facilities in the U.S.: the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh, Pa; the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Ore., the Spokane Convention Center expansion in Spokane, Wash.; the Kansas City Convention Center Grand Ballroom in Kansas City, Mo.; the Phoenix Convention Center and the Los Angeles Convention Center.

Besides a host of green practices that include recycling, energy and water conservation and the use of locally grown, organic produce in catering, the VBCC also sports an on-site herb garden. This level of environmental consciousness also extends into the community itself, with more than 100 businesses, including hotels and restaurants, Virginia Green certified.

Surrounded by the scenic Blue Ridge Mountains, the city of Asheville, N.C., is undergoing a green transformation. As more and more of the destination's hospitality businesses adopt sustainable practices, Asheville is also turning more of its attention towards sustainable offerings for green meetings and events.

According to Dodie Stephens, PR manager of the Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACVB), "keeping it local" has been one of the city's long-standing environmental values, including an emphasis on serving indigenous, locally grown food within its network of restaurants and hospitality-related businesses.

In keeping with the local focus, the ACVB recently launched an initiative called "The Asheville Offset" in partnership with local Warren Wilson College's program, "Insulate!" According to Stephens, this "voluntourism" program gives meetings groups the opportunity to purchase carbon offsets to mitigate the environmental impact of their travel while helping fund the student volunteer program that weatherizes homes of citizens below the poverty level, free of charge.

"Natural beauty is part of Asheville and our local culture is infused with the desire to celebrate and protect it," says Tim Lampkin, ACVB director of convention sales and group services. "The Asheville Offset allows attendees to reduce their carbon footprint in a way that directly reduces energy consumption on a local level."

The city of Buffalo, N.Y., is charging ahead with its 2-year-old Buffalo Green Hospitality Initiative, "Green & Mean (It)." Created by the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau (BNCVB) in conjunction with more than 20 local hospitality partners, the goal of the initiative is to develop and maintain environmentally responsible practices and promote a green experience for tourists and convention guests visiting the region.

Sustainable practices include using local food and beverage

With the Blue Ridge Mountains as a backdrop, Asheville, N.C., is already pretty green, but the city has developed new initiatives to encourage more sustainable practices for meetings and events.





## CASE STUDY

# U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL

**Name:** Ashley Katz, Communications Manager

**Event:** Greenbuild International Conference & Expo. Greenbuild convenes the industry's largest gathering of representatives from all sectors of the green building movement and offers three days of extensive educational programming and workshops. A vast exhibition floor and ample networking events provide [participants] opportunities to learn about the latest technological innovations, explore new products and exchange ideas with other professionals.

**Green Assignment:** We had a multi-pronged strategy for greening last year's show in Boston. We focused on greening exhibitor booths, food and beverage, printing, signage and registration, show waste and show hotels.

**Special Challenges:** Printing, signage and registration always pose challenges, as all of these are important [to the event] but obviously quite wasteful. Our Boston show was the largest conference in Greenbuild's seven-year history, so this initiative was even more challenging, yet all the more important, given the sheer size of the show.

**Solutions:** In Boston, we switched to a 100 percent paperless and ticket-less registration process, which dramatically reduced the use of paper.

**Results:** Our decision to print using 100 percent post-consumer paper has saved 23 trees, 8,247 gallons of water, 16 million BTUs of energy, 2,000 pounds of carbon dioxide and 1,000 pounds of solid waste. Signage developed for Greenbuild 2007 was re-used in Boston. We'll continue those strategies at this year's show in Phoenix.

**Advice:** Continue to raise the bar and ask the global meetings industry to evolve their practices to minimize their impact on the environment.



Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau

The 67-acre CityCenter megaresort is adding a new green perspective to Las Vegas with its LEED-certification, a first for the city.

products, an extensive recycling program, using renewable energy, banning Styrofoam, using recycled products and environmentally friendly cleaning supplies, donating unused foods to food banks and using state-of-the-art, energy efficient HVAC systems.

Greening Buffalo's hospitality industry has been a smart, and timely, move for the destination, according to Cheryl Zanghi, director of services and special projects at the BNCVB.

"Going green is no longer a choice, but a requirement," Zanghi says. "Industry research shows that over 67 percent of meetings professionals are looking for sustainable practices when considering holding an event in a particular city."

This push towards a greener hospitality community extends to Buffalo's individual hotel partners, and an example of greening in action has taken root at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Buffalo, in the form of a rooftop herb garden. Using soil made from composted hotel food scraps, the garden is irrigated by rainwater collected in rain barrels, and produces a variety of herbs that are used in the property's culinary services.

## HOTELS: GROWING GREENER

Along with hospitality companies such as Hyatt, Marriott International and Fairmont Hotels & Resorts boasting a variety of environmental, green meeting and social responsibility practices and programs, hotels across the country are also picking up the green pace by taking steps including adopting waste-reducing and energy-saving practices, earning green certifications and become socially responsible members of their local and global communities. Here are just a couple

of examples of hotels working harder than ever to be kinder to the planet.

The city of San Francisco continues to be a pioneer in environmental practices, and this extends to its hospitality community. The city by the bay is also home to the San Francisco Hotel/Non-Profit Collaborative, a progressive, local industry-wide recycling and reuse network whose mission is to divert usable discards from the waste stream of hospitality organizations and donate them to non-profit, charitable organizations serving the community.

Started 13 years ago by Jo Licata, community projects manager at the Hilton San Francisco, the successful program now boasts the participation of approximately 20 large properties, including the Moscone Center and other hospitality business, as well as more than 20 non-profit organizations and office buildings. According to Licata, the informal, grass-roots organization has kept thousands of tons of discarded but usable goods and equipment out of landfill, and given them a second life in the non-profit community at no cost to local tax-payers.

"Throwing away all those beds, sofas, foam-core signs and giveaways costs money in labor and garbage bills," Licata says. "Donating them to worthy causes not only saves money by making the problems 'go away,' but also goes a long way in creating a positive spirit of giving."

Taking advantage of statewide Green Lodging programs and environmental certifications is becoming more and more impor-

*“Work with your venue services manager to identify existing green programs. Each city may have an environmental program that you may be able to utilize.”*

— L.J. Williams, International Meetings Manager, Rotary International

tant to hotels, so much so that some hospitality companies are designing and building new properties with sustainability in mind.

Completed last July, the Hotel Indigo San Diego Gaslamp Quarter is the first hotel property in San Diego to boast LEED certification. Built green through and through, the property possesses a host of environmental practices in its operations, including a property-wide recycling program, an on-site herb garden and a heat pump plant, and the use of locally grown food in catering. It plans to launch a new property management system at the end of the year that will allow the hotel to go paperless.

According to Pat McTigue, Hotel Indigo

director of sales, although sustainability has been important to parent company InterContinental Hotels Group for some time, the new property is a physical example of that passion in action.

“(IHG has) had a sustainability page on its Web site speaking to our corporate responsibility,” McTigue says, “(but) this was our first opportunity to put our money where our mouth was.”

#### LEEDing THE MOVEMENT

For those new to the terminology, the Leadership In Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System is the international benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high-performance green buildings. Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council in 1998, six convention centers and approximately 20 hotel properties in the U.S. have earned LEED certification thus far.

Built green through and through, the Hotel Indigo in San Diego’s Gaslamp Quarter plans to be paperless by the end of the year.



#### CASE STUDY

## ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

**Name:** Michelle Horton, Meetings Manager

**Event:** ESA Annual Meeting. Its purpose is to share and promote research in the ecology community.

**Green Assignment:** Banning bottled water at our meeting.

**Special Challenges:** Being in Albuquerque, N.M., it was very important to have water during our field trips, but not use bottled water.

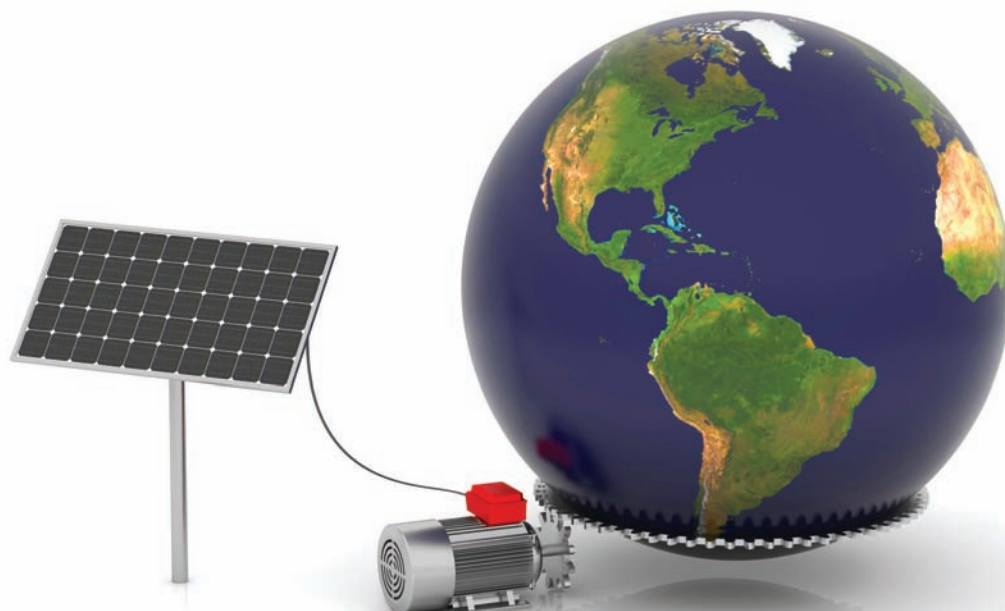
**Solutions:** ESA purchased aluminum water bottles. Staff and volunteers filled them with filtered water at the convention center and gave one to each field trip participant. The remaining bottles were sold at our booth and were very popular.

**Results:** Our water bottles did not end up in the landfill and were used not only for the field trips, but also throughout the meeting. (They were) refilled with water from convention center water stations and also used during our coffee breaks.

**Advice:** You must start thinking green now. Even if it’s just a small step, such as not using Styrofoam products, you need to take action. There is so much available help from which to draw (from organizations such as) GMIC, PCMA, MPI, ASAE, etc., that you need not do this alone.







## SEEING THE LIGHT

### Convention centers going solar

In their commitment towards sustainable practices, some convention centers are going the extra mile by using solar energy to help power their facilities. Here are some of the latest venues to harness the sun:

#### **VENUE: ATLANTIC CITY CONVENTION CENTER, NEW JERSEY**

Completed in late 2008, a 14,000-panel, 2.36-megawatt, 290,000-sq.-ft. solar array now supplies 26 percent of the facility's energy needs. According to the ACCC, it is the largest single roof-mounted solar array in the U.S. Last September, New Jersey granted the facility \$1.5 million to construct a single wind turbine to help provide power to the facility. With a budget of \$3.4 million, the project is expected to take approximately 16 months to complete.

#### **VENUE: GEORGIA R. BROWN CONVENTION CENTER, HOUSTON, TEXAS**

Last July, the facility finished installing 600 solar panels onto its 16-acre roof as part of a pilot program through the U.S. Department of Energy's Solar America Cities program. According to GRBCC officials, the 100-kilowatt research project is part of a total "green roof vision" for the city-owned convention center, including the possible installation of a rooftop herb garden.

#### **VENUE: ORANGE COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER, ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

Completed in May of this year, the 1.3-megawatt photovoltaic system occupies more than 200,000 square feet of



The photovoltaic system on the rooftop of the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando is largest of its kind in the Southeastern U.S. and creates enough power to meet the electricity needs of 100 typical homes.

roof space on the facility's North/South building and is capable of generating 1,300-1,500 megawatt hours of electricity annually. According to OCCC officials, it is the largest rooftop system of its kind in the Southeastern U.S. and creates enough power to meet the electricity needs of 100 typical homes.

#### **VENUE: PHOENIX CONVENTION CENTER, ARIZONA**

Since May of last year, 732 thin-film solar panels have occupied 20,000 square feet of the West building's two-acre roof, producing approximately 150,000 kilowatt-hours of energy per year. According to Phoenix city officials, the photovoltaic laminate solar panel system is expected to reduce the convention center's carbon dioxide pollution by 95 metric tons annually and generate enough electricity to power 12-14 typical homes per year.

When you think of Las Vegas, you don't exactly picture a green city, but one new resort property is about to bring sustainability to the Strip. Scheduled to open in phases beginning Dec. 1, 2009, the CityCenter megaresort is the first hotel, casino and resort property in Las Vegas to achieve LEED certification.

Owned by MGM Mirage, the 67-acre, five-resort and condominium development, which includes a tri-level, 300,000-sq.-ft. convention center, will be one of the largest sustainable developments in existence, according to company officials. Recently, the USGBC awarded Gold LEED certification to the resort's flagship hotel tower at the Aria Resort & Casino, as well as to its convention center, theater and the Vdara Hotel & Spa.

Although LEED certification has helped dispel misunderstandings about what signifies an environmentally friendly building, confusion and mislabeling remain among industry members about what makes a meeting or event green. A select group of industry members and organizations joined forces and have been working for almost two years to establish uniform industry standards.

Enter the Convention Industry Council's Accepted Practices Exchange Commission (APEX), the Green Meetings Industry Council, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), which are currently in the process of creating the APEX Green Meeting and Events Standard. With a task force of 50 all-volunteer members representing various sides of the meetings and convention industry, the APEX Green Meetings and Events Practice Panel expects the standard to be made available by the end of this year.

According to Amy Spatrisano of MeetGreen, chair of the APEX panel, the standard couldn't come at a better time.

"People want a checklist, they want guidelines and they want specifics (about what is green)," Spatrisano says.

Whatever the pace of change, there seems to be no question that the environmental movement is on the agenda for meetings and events. ■





## Have your meeting in Asheville and have it all!

Looking for the perfect place for your next meeting or event? Look no further than Asheville, N.C. We've got all the facilities and amenities you'll need, along with a unique energy and inspiring local vibe you won't find anywhere else.

**ASHEVILLE**

[thinkbetterhere.com](http://thinkbetterhere.com)

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