

Santa Fe's Green Lodging Initiative, Phase II

Savings for Businesses and Tangible Benefits for the Community

Ashley Zappe

Like the people who run them, many businesses in Santa Fe would like to go green but don't know where to start and are intimidated by the idea that going green takes \$green\$. And yet, what we're learning, as we begin to shift our economy toward more environmentally and socially conscious practices, is that huge savings emerge when we tighten up the efficiency of our operations and reduce waste.

A shining example of this is the Santa Fe Watershed Association's Green Lodging Initiative, which just wrapped up 18 months of hard work and produced highly visible impact to the environment and to the 12 lodging facilities that participated to earn their Bronze Level certification in the Green Concierge Certification program. Funded by a \$49,700 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the initiative was a private/public partnership that worked directly with Santa Fe's hospitality industry to save money, conserve water and decrease chemical and carbon pollution going into the river and watershed.

In February, 2013, the Watershed Association hired HospitalityGreen LLC (HG), a New York-based firm specializing in environmental and operations consulting services and founder of the nationally recognized Green Concierge Certification® program, to provide technical assistance, green-team training and customized coaching to the Santa Fe participants. They trained a total of 90 employees from these properties: Eldorado Hotel, Houses of the Moon at 10,000 Waves, Hotel Santa Fe Hacienda & Spa, Inn of the Five Graces, Inn of the Governors, Casa Cuma Bed and Breakfast, Inn on the Alameda, La Fonda on the Plaza, La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa, Old Santa Fe Inn, Santa Fe Inn, Santa Fe Sage Inn and Silver Saddle Motel. Trainings covered topics such as effective business practices that conserve water, energy efficiency, decreasing carbon emissions, sourcing products from the local economy and limiting toxic chemical use, all of which save money. In October, 2013, HG conducted on-site, third-party assessments of the 13 properties. The assessments determined whether the properties met the rigors of the certification, which requires that a property meet multiple standards and track resource-use over time. Twelve of the 13 achieved their goals to receive Bronze Level Recognition. A ceremony of congratulations was held on Earth Day, April 23, at the Inn of the Governors, where plaques were awarded.

All of the participants are now better equipped to effectively operate their business in a more sustainable and locally beneficial way. Because of the program, 36 percent of the lodging facilities in Santa Fe are current Green Concierge Certificate holders.

Cumulatively, they have already saved over 2.1 million kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity and 1.5 million gallons of water. This makes a total reduction of 6,163 metric tons of CO2 emissions, the equivalent of removing 1,297 passenger cars from the road for one year, and enough daily water for 14,286 Santa Fe homes. Further, by switching cleaning products, they eliminated over 2,000 lbs. of hazardous chemicals from entering Santa Fe's wastewater treatment plant and, thus, the Santa Fe River. For their efforts,

these businesses collectively saved themselves more than \$128,000. The Santa Fe Watershed Association's program was recognized by the city as the 2013 Sustainable Santa Fe Award winner in the category of Green Economic Development.

Angela Rodden, director of Human Resources and Green Team leader at the Eldorado Hotel, said, "When our general manager first announced his intention for our property to participate in the initiative, I was a bit leery due to costs associated with such a program. Once we completed the training, however, many of my fears were alleviated. HG was able to recommend low- to no-cost procedures that we were able to implement quickly, which immediately made an impact. Evadne Giannini, founder and CEO of HG, personally spoke to vendors in the Santa Fe area to provide the hotel options when making changes to our soft-goods products and recycling program. Participation in this program made us more aware of our impact on the environment. Many employees not only supported these changes in the hotel, they also made changes in their personal lives."

These savings translate to benefits seven times greater than the numbers show. Our air and water are cleaner, both human and environmental health are improved, and local businesses thrive from the local purchasing practices. The financial savings could create more local jobs and improve our economy. Glenn Schiffbauer, executive director of the Santa Fe Green Chamber of Commerce, says, "If you take all that has come out of this initiative en todo, what you get is one more arrow in Santa Fe's branding quiver; we are becoming a destination for an ever-growing green travel market."

The Sustainable Santa Fe Commission will be focusing its work over the next year on identifying and addressing similar "golden green" opportunities that require only simple resource conservation and efficiency upgrades. One of the projects we've advocated for is the continuation of the Green Lodging Initiative, which will leverage \$50,000 to conserve thousands of additional gallons of water, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make Santa Fe a destination of choice for ecotourists.

City Councilors Peter Ives, Signe Lindell, Chris Rivera, Patti Bushee and Bill Dimas all signed onto a resolution endorsing the Green Lodging Initiative and directing staff to explore ways to continue, fund and extend the initiative to all lodging facilities in the city of Santa Fe. A \$50,000 investment from the city, approved by the council last month, will be used to promote the goal of expanding the program to achieve Green Concierge certification for the remaining 64 percent of the lodging facilities. Given that the city of Santa Fe annually collects in excess of \$8 million in taxes from lodging facilities, this initiative represents an investment in one of our economy's mainstays.

Santa Fe can and should be a national leader in the green economy. In order to lead the transition, we need to invest public funds, as well as enlist the ingenuity and resources of our business community. After exploring the possibility of a comprehensive Green Business Certification program, the Sustainable Santa Fe Commission and its partners are getting behind the Green Lodging Initiative, seeing the success in the hospitality industry as a model for other sectors to follow. By providing a framework and concrete systemic change for greener operations, the initiative is demonstrating that money invested in efficiency upgrades and resource conservation leads to financial savings and community benefits. Successful local

stories of “going green” will surely attract the attention of other business owners and the interest of ecotourists worldwide.

Ashley Zappe is an environmental science educator. She is currently Earth Care’s AmeriCorps member, working with the city of Santa Fe’s Sustainability programs. Felicity Broennan, former executive director of the Santa Fe Watershed Association, contributed to this story.