

Santa Fe Watershed Association Brings True Green Change to the Hospitality Industry

More than one million tourists visit Santa Fe each year. They are welcomed and are an important part of the economy. However, they put considerable pressure on environmental resources—particularly water.

“Our hotels are such an important economic driver in Santa Fe, but due to the nature of the business, there’s tremendous waste associated with the day-to-day operations,” says Felicity Broennan, executive director of the Santa Fe Watershed Association. In a proactive response to those impacts, the association applied for and was awarded an 18-month grant (through May 2014) from the US Environmental Protection Agency for a pilot project: the ***Santa Fe Green Lodging Initiative***. “The \$50,000 plus plenty of in-kind matching gave us enough seed money so that the lodging businesses that signed up have been receiving all of the training for free, which is a huge help, especially for the smaller ones,” Broennan said.

The program has focused on increasing water conservation efforts and the reduction of chemical pollutants entering the Santa Fe River watershed. The initiative reflects the Watershed Association’s mission of improving ecological and economic resilience in the region by creating cross-disciplinary partnerships. “We really weren’t sure how many businesses would join because it’s an intense commitment; so when we hit our target, we were thrilled.” said Broennan.

The Watershed Association contracted with HospitalityGreen LLC, founder of the nationally recognized *Green Concierge Certification*™ program, to provide the training, coaching and individualized technical assistance that leads to third-party green certification. HospitalityGreen’s work in the Catskills in New York State resulted in measured environmental and financial outcomes. There, participating businesses diverted at least 2,640 tons of waste to reuse or recycling, saved approximately \$324,900 in the first year, and increased occupancy by 20–25 percent. Certifying over 20 properties helped legitimately brand the Catskills as a green destination, resulting in increased tourism and local jobs. Similar results are expected in Santa Fe.

The initiative launched in November 2012 with a diverse cross-section of lodging businesses representing almost 50 percent of Santa Fe’s hotel rooms: La Fonda on the Plaza, La Posada de Santa Fe Resort and Spa, Old Santa Fe Inn, Inn on the Alameda, Silver Saddle Motel, Eldorado Hotel and Spa, Santa Fe Sage Inn, Hotel Santa Fe, Inn of the Governors, Ten Thousand Waves, Inn at Santa Fe, Inn of the Five Graces, Fort Marcy Suites, and Casa Cuma Bed and Breakfast.

By adopting streamlined sustainable practices, these local businesses save money, upgrade their facility to meet growing market expectations and increase their competitive advantage in the expanding green hospitality marketplace. It’s projected that the initiative will save almost six million gallons of water in the first year.

The training began with each of the 14 enterprises forming a “Green Team” comprised of management, food-and-beverage and housekeeping staff members. The teams learned the basics of sustainable operational practices, including the use of environmentally friendly cleaning products, reducing energy-

and water use, and managing waste and recyclables. The Green Teams conducted assessments of their facilities and are currently developing implementation plans.

HospitalityGreen encourages a transition approach and to first go after the “low-hanging fruit.” The teams reported that after the first day’s training they had made simple but concrete changes, such as placing their first order of recycled paper, thawing food in bowls of water rather than under a running spigot, phasing-out Styrofoam™ cups, and moving towards digital reservation management rather than printed.

From April-July, the initiative conducted bi-weekly webinars on specific sustainable operations topics. In August, HospitalityGreen provided individual coaching and technical assistance, and in November, each of the businesses underwent third-party certification assessments. Lessons learned will be shared and the next steps will be defined during a Green Lodging Forum in early 2014.

Ultimately these lodging providers will measure how their newly adopted sustainable practices have impacted the environmental indicators—hard numbers measured as gallons of water conserved and tons of reduced toxic chemicals released into the river and landfills—as well as dollars saved in operational expenses.

Another important part of the initiative’s success is the inter-sector working group organized to support and promote the effort. The working group serves as the think-and-do tank that is developing cross-marketing strategies, sharing best management practices and creating the longer-term vision for future projects and networking of ideas, talents, resources and contacts.

Members of the working group include:

- Santa Fe Convention and Visitors Bureau
- City of Santa Fe Environmental Services Division
- Santa Fe Lodgers Association
- New Mexico Lodging Association
- Santa Fe Community College Sustainable Technologies Center
- New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce, Santa Fe chapter
- Inn of the Governors
- La Posada de Santa Fe Resort and Spa
- City of Santa Fe Water Conservation Division