

CommunicateGreen: Seacoast lodging gets 'green makeover'

By Christopher Peake
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"Reduce, Recycle, Use Local" is a mantra well-known to Seacoast residents. Our homes have become models of environmental efforts and we've taken this attitude to our workplaces. With so many people traveling and over-nighting in places other than their homes, what about hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts? There are scores of them along the Seacoast, from York to Seabrook and west to Epping and Dover. How green are they?

The Green Hotels Association (greenhotels.com) says on average we renovate our homes every 20 years while hotels renovate every 6 to 7 years.

This, then, gives the hotel owner the chance to make the cost-effective improvements that will save them as much money as possible.

And these days, thanks to federal, state and local governments as well as many utility companies there is a green financial incentive. It is cost effective to be green (despite those expensive blue trash bags we Exeter residents need each week), as the hoteliers I spoke to attest. It's also, they all say, "the right thing to do." Good business practice to some degree, perhaps, but nevertheless heartfelt and genuine in practice.

The hotels, motel and B&B interviewed were chosen at random. Although they represent an average sampling, they have many green practices in common as well as the commitment to making their guests feel they're contributing to cleaning the environment.

The Wentworth by the Sea hotel in New Castle has 161 rooms; that represents a lot of traveling traffic. Stephanie Secord, director of public relations, says, "Hoteliers are trained in hospitality; they will respond to customers' comments." And comments have been favorable to such green efforts as using low-energy lighting, supplying writing pens made from post-consumer products and joining with other hotels and restaurants in the Share our Strength food distribution program.

Vendors are the key to greening a hotel. From up-to-date heating and cooling units, cleaning products and hand dryers to recycling cooking oil and wastewater filtration, someone has developed or is working on a way to save the environment while saving money.

The larger hotels and elevated parking buildings are installing motion detectors to turn off lights when they're not needed. Uneaten food is converted to pet food and fertilizer.

The **Inn by the Bandstand** is a 9-room, 200-year-old B&B in Exeter. Not discounting the constant renovation required to maintain the historic building the innkeepers are doing the little things that let their guests feel like they, too, are doing the right thing: No more individual disposable bottles of water ...; bottled water is now offered in a carafe. No more little plastic bottles of soap, shampoo and conditioner ...; guests now pump what they need from larger, refillable containers. "More cost effective and much less waste" says innkeeper Sara Lane.

Hotels use a mammoth amount of water just washing bed and restaurant linens and they burn an enormous amount of heat drying them. Nearly every hotel now gives guests the option of using the same sheets and towels for as long as three days. Consider the savings: less water, soap and electricity as well as requiring less manpower.

Lighting is another huge energy-taker. Michael Roy at the Marguerite Motel on Hampton Beach, says, "We now have LED lighting inside and outside" the property. Like his fellow hoteliers, Roy is big on recycling, but with a twist: "I pay someone to handle the recycling three hours a day when he could be doing some other job on the property." He says, "I haven't done a cost analysis" on recycling hours and new lighting and reusing bed linens, "but I'm sure I'll come out ahead, and I'm just doing the right thing."

Eric Lusty at the Dockside Guest Quarters in York, said, "We belong to a couple of hotel associations and they tell us guests like certain amenities like the small plastic bottles of shampoo and lotion, but we've discontinued bottled water in each room," he said. "Our guests want these things." Aside from basic recycling, lighting and guest-option linen changes at Dockside, "I guess we're not particularly green."

Hoteliers have noticed the growing "green" sophistication of their guests. Officials at The Exeter Inn say they're very conscious of reducing their carbon footprint. Quoting the Green Hotels Association: "The Green Financial Incentive is what drives most of the hoteliers; how green you are definitely reflects on where travelers will stay."

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