



## GMIC's Greening the Hospitality Industry Conference Wraps Up in Pittsburgh

By Glenn Hasek  
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David L. Lawrence Convention Center

PITTSBURGH, PA.—Approximately 180 people attended the Greening the Hospitality Industry conference from February 24 to 26 at the LEED Gold certified David L. Lawrence Convention Center in downtown Pittsburgh. The event was organized by the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC) and attracted hoteliers, meeting planners, government representatives and others with a stake in the green meetings industry. Even with the turnout that was lighter than hoped for, GMIC still had plenty to celebrate. In 2008, it increased its membership by 320 percent and now has 345 members in 20 countries with three chapters in formation (Atlanta, Chicago, Florida/Caribbean). Many other communities around the United States have also expressed interest in forming chapters. "This organization is thriving," said Amy Spatrisano, president, GMIC.

The keynote speaker was L. Hunter Lovins, author of "Natural Capitalism" and president and founder of Natural Capital Solutions. Lovins, who spoke via Internet from Boulder, Colo., summarized some of the "big picture" environmental challenges.

"We are losing every ecosystem on the planet," she said. "We could lose 60 percent to 90 percent of species in the next 100 years. Two-thirds of the world is short of water. We may have 33 years worth of oil left."

Lovins also discussed the potential for those in the hospitality industry to have a positive environmental impact, saying that existing technologies can make hotel buildings three to four times more efficient.

"Look around you and ask, 'How are you using electricity in a stupid way?'" Lovins said.

She added that those hospitality companies that pursue sustainability will benefit from increased financial performance, reduce their financial risk, drive innovation more quickly, attract and retain the best talent, have more productive employees, and earn greater market share.

### Hotel Leadership Panel

Three lodging industry veterans participated in a session entitled, "Hotels as Leaders of Sustainable Change." The panelists included Steve Faulstick, general manager of the Doubletree Hotel & Executive Meeting Center Portland-Lloyd Center in Portland, Ore., Molly Ray, manager of sustainable partnerships for Kimpton Hotels, and Tom Griffin, director and co-founder of Greener Results.

Faulstick highlighted some of the many programs that have been implemented at his award-winning, Green Seal certified hotel. A few of the hotel's accomplishments: receiving the American Hotel & Lodging Association's Green Hotel Award in 2008, reducing overall waste disposal by 65 percent since 1996, and purchasing 65 percent of food products from within a 500-mile region.

Kimpton's Ray discussed her company's EarthCare program as well as the newly-formed Sustainable Partnerships Program, which strategically aligns Kimpton's hotels with like-minded eco-friendly organizations by offering discounted room rates and incentives. Ray recently completed Kimpton's first carbon footprint project to measure how Hotel Monaco Seattle's activities impact the environment. The company is using this information to create a pilot program for Kimpton's national network of 42 hotels in 19 cities.

Griffin summarized his work on Virginia Green, that state's effort to green all sectors of Virginia tourism, including lodging, restaurants and conference centers. Griffin said more than 200 lodging properties are currently participating in Virginia's program. He provided attendees with a tour of the Virginia Green website which includes detailed information about the specific steps lodging establishments are taking to reduce their environmental impact.

### **DNC Case Study Presented**

Jaime Nack, president, Three Squares Inc., and Lindsay Smith, sustainable programs manager, SMG/Colorado Convention Center, presented a case study that showed how the 2008 Democratic National Convention (DNC) was turned into a massive green meeting. Key focus areas of the efforts in Denver included the DNC offices, host hotel Hyatt Regency Denver, Colorado Convention Center, Invesco Field at Mile High, and the Pepsi Center.

The DNC was successful from a green meeting standpoint, the speakers said, because of the number of volunteers, proper signage, recycling stations, education, emphasis on making the event walk-friendly, and use of compostable bioware in food service operations. Organizers were successful at diverting 70 percent of the event's waste (62 tons) from the landfill. Throughout the planning for the event and the event itself, efforts were made to offset any carbon impact.

"The goal was to set a new green standard for all conventions," Smith said. ([Click here](#) for more details on the greening of the DNC.)

Eric Ricourte and Walker Lunn with EnviRelation, LLC presented a session entitled, "Why Carbon as the Standard for Measurement?" Ricourte discussed trends in greenhouse gas emissions regulation and reporting and their effects on green meetings. He also helped attendees understand how carbon offsetting works and why it is important. Ricourte predicted that hotels and hotel companies would be subject to greenhouse gas emissions reporting once a cap and trade system is required and enforced. He encouraged meeting planners and those working at host facilities to be prepared to address the "carbon neutral conundrum."

### **LOHAS Consumers Explained**

In her presentation, Colette Chandler, president of The Marketing Insider, focused on "How to Effectively Market to Become One of the 'In' Brands." She explained who is influencing the green and health trends. This audience is comprised of 60 percent women and these individuals are highly educated, have above average income, are avid readers and radio listeners, are "leading edge" thinkers, and influence the buying decisions of family and friends. LOHAS consumers, those practicing "Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability," account for more than \$200 billion in sales annually, Chandler says. LOHAS consumers are twice as likely to buy in green categories.

Chandler encouraged hospitality-related businesses to train their sales teams to sell the "green and health" concept. She also emphasized the importance of telling customers what one is doing that is green and to be transparent about it.

In a session focusing on "Standards, Certifications and Green Meetings," three speakers brought session attendees up to date on the establishment of a green meetings standard, changes with Green Seal certification, and developments related to the United Nations Foundation's Global Sustainability Criteria.

### **Green Meeting Standards Coming Soon**

Harry Lewis, an attorney in the EPA's Pollution Prevention Division, said green meetings standards are currently being developed by parties including GMIC, the EPA, the Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX), Convention Industry Council (CIC) and ASTM International. Nine committees have been formed to address categories including: accommodations, AV/production, communications, destination selection, exhibits, food and beverage, meeting venue, onsite office, and transportation. More information regarding the meetings standards will be available soon but Lewis said he expects ASTM, the organization charged with establishing international standards, to finalize the meetings standards in late 2009 or early 2010.

Mark Petruzzi, vice president of certification for Green Seal, detailed the changes in his organization's GS-33 Lodging Properties Standard and announced that the new GS-46 standard for Restaurants and Foodservices operations should be ready by May. In lodging, Green Seal recently revised its program to include three tiers: bronze, silver and gold. Petruzzi said the revision has generated a lot of interest in the lodging industry.

Kate Dodson, deputy director of sustainable development with the United Nations Foundation, wrapped up the session with a Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria update. The 37 criteria, which were put together by a coalition of 32 organizations, were launched in October 2008. The criteria already are being used by Expedia and Travelocity. Dodson's biggest news was that a

Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council is being put together. Its purpose will be to accredit tourism-related certification programs that meet a minimum standard.

Next year's Greening the Hospitality Industry conference will be held in Denver. Watch for details soon at [www.greenmeetings.info](http://www.greenmeetings.info).

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