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Clearing the Air: Professional meetings and conferences are still big business for FreshStay's smoke-free hotels and resorts.

SAINT CHARLES, MISSOURI — MAY XX, 2009 — With all the news about federal bailouts for the financial sector and lavish retreats by executives, corporate meetings and conferences suddenly have been given a bit of a black eye. There's a perception that these events consist of businessmen sitting around drinking scotch and smoking cigars all day.

But in this time of economic uncertainty, one thing is sure: there definitely won't be anyone smoking cigars at professional meetings hosted by members of FreshStay.com.

FreshStay.com is the largest, easiest and most comprehensive online directory of smoke free hotels in the world. Dedicated to assisting Frequent Breathers™ worldwide locate and book lodging accommodations featuring better indoor air quality, FreshStay properties guarantee a 100 percent smoke-free experience in every facet of hotel operations — from guest rooms to lobbies to in-house restaurants and especially meeting facilities.

Taking our tongue out of our cheek, meetings and events are still crucially important to the success of many in the travel and hospitality industries. According to the U.S. Travel Association, meetings and events are responsible for nearly 15 percent of all travel in the United States and create \$101 billion in spending, one million jobs and nearly \$16 billion in tax revenue at the federal, state and local level. Without the jobs generated by travel for meetings and events, the unemployment rate in the United States would jump from 7.6 percent to 8.2 percent.

But in light of the downturn in the economy, and the increased scrutiny companies are facing from the public, the media and their shareholders — regardless of whether they needed bailing out or not — Meeting Professionals International predicts a drop of 5 percent in meeting attendance in 2009.

As the old saying goes, one door closes, another one opens. Though meeting and event budgets are under more scrutiny than ever, the 100 percent smoke-free facilities offered by members of FreshStay.com allow businesses to demonstrate they are as committed to healthy lifestyles as they are to a healthy business.

“Though businesses are closely guarding their budgets these days, corporate meetings, events and conferences are still important to getting work done,” says Dave Janicke, the CBO — Chief Breathing Officer — for FreshStay.com. “Whether it’s for developing strategies, networking, training or as an incentive to top performers, event planners can be sure that when they choose to meet at a FreshStay facility, they are choosing a location built for healthy and socially responsible travel.

FreshStay.com properties guarantee 100 percent smoke-free facilities, which lets conference organizers know that they can focus on the business at hand, and not have to worry about offering smoking breaks every hour. It lets attendees breathe easier during the day and at night knowing that they won’t be bothered by dangerous second-hand smoke. It keeps the facilities clean and refreshing and ready for a hard day’s work.

“And in this economy, offering healthier travel options is one way our members are distinguishing themselves above the competition,” Janicke adds.

Refurbished and Refreshed

Recently reopened after a \$20 million rebuild/renovation, management and guests of the Holiday Inn Airport Conference Center - Little Rock, Ark. Can’t say enough about the “feel good atmosphere” that going smoke-free has brought.

“When we were first built, smoking was at its height. As time went on, we were running out of non-smoking rooms and kept increasing them little by little,” says Director of Sales Jan Jewell. “With all the effort we put into the renovation, we found that employees, guests, meeting planners didn’t want to be walking around and be able to smell the lingering effects of smoke anymore.”

“People now really appreciate that we’ve made the commitment to be totally smoke-free,” she adds.

The conference aspect of the Little Rock Holiday Inn has been a huge part of the hotel’s business. The facilities boast 15 meeting rooms, 22,000 square feet of meeting space, 5 sales and meeting professionals on site, and a 9,000 square foot Atrium space available for meals and exhibits.

Jewell says along with its convenient location near the airport, being smoke-free and aligning itself as a green hotel (with recycling programs, added insulation, etc.) plays a large part in bringing meeting professionals to the hotel.

Plus, being smoke-free has had a few unexpected benefits.

“Being completely non-smoking, guests get exactly the kind of room that they want every time,” Jewell says. “This means that if they are coming for a meeting, they don’t have to worry about checking in first to make sure they get a non-smoking room. It lets them relax and really focus on the business they came here for.”

Fresh Start

The Sheraton Columbia Town Center Hotel in Columbia, Md., has also just completed a comprehensive \$12 million dollar renovation, with all 290-guest rooms and public spaces entirely transformed.

As with all Starwood properties, the hotel is required to be 100 percent smoke-free, but it's a choice management happily went along with.

"We are a conference hotel and the attendees appreciate the clean air they can breathe now that we are smoke free," says Sharon Baker, the hotel's Director of Sales & Marketing. "Our customers love the fact that we are smoke free, and the trend is not to smoke today, so it is a perfect match for the hotel and them."

Located in a resort-like setting among twelve wooded acres, the hotel is a popular destination for corporate meetings, social events, weddings, and for business and leisure travelers visiting the Baltimore-Washington region. According to the hotel, the Sheraton's revitalized function spaces have been completely refurbished. Total meeting square footage has increased from 12,000 to 14,000 accommodating up to 500. Two new meeting rooms have been created: the Patuxent Boardroom, an airy space with comfortable, ergonomic chairs and large windows facing the lake; and the Merriweather Executive Meeting Room that is ideal for events and social gatherings. In addition, a brand new private dining room is available for meetings and special occasions.

The renovated meeting spaces, combined with a superb location at Town Center, provides clients and groups technologically-enhanced facilities while meeting the attendees' recreational and entertainment needs.

"With a smoke free environment and a newly renovated hotel the advantage is tremendous as we do not have to get smoke out of existing bed packaging, drapes and furnishings," says Baker. "So we really have a Fresh Start and give our guests a Fresh Stay with our newly renovated smoke-free property."

Environmentally conscious upgrades to lighting, heating and cooling systems were also part of the property improvements, increasing energy efficiency throughout the hotel.

"Working with FreshStay is a great way to get the word out that we were 100% smoke free," Baker adds.

Clean and Green

Sawmill Creek Resort and Conference Center facility in Huron, Ohio, is Ohio's premier Lake Erie destination for productive meetings, conferences, conventions, trade shows, teambuilding, executive retreats and family reunions. The 50,000 square feet of flexible meeting space is complemented by a highly trained convention staff who handle a multitude of decisions and details to assure a successful meeting.

"We became a non-smoking hotel as of January 1, 2009," says Edwina Chamberlin, Sawmill's Guest Services Director. "Since that time the comments from guests making reservations have been totally in support of the fact that we are non-smoking."

In addition to going smoke-free, the 236-room Sawmill Creek Resort and Conference Center, Huron, Ohio has set a course to reduce their carbon footprint. The resort is Ohio's first resort/hotel to initiate an organics recycling program. By working closely with Barnes Nursery, Inc. and the Barnes Regional Composting Facility, located less than two miles away in Huron, the kitchen and dining room staff have perfected a system of separating all food, paper, soiled cardboard and other compostable packaging waste for separate collection. The resort offices have initiated an office paper recycling program as part of the organics plan. This organic waste is then taken to the composting site where it is composted into high end soil amendments and mulch.

Catered events also use cloth napkins, table cloths, china and glassware instead of disposable serving dishes.

“Our hotel is 80 percent conferences and conventions, and the comments from meeting planners and their attendees is always positive,” Chamberlin says.

About Pineapple Hospitality

Headquartered in Saint Charles, Missouri, Pineapple Hospitality™ is an EPA ENERGY STAR™ partner bringing fresh ideas to hospitality guests' doors and owner/operators' bottom lines — including FreshStay® (www.freshstay.com), EcoRooms & EcoSuites (www.EcoRooms.com) Environmentally Sensitive Amenities™, EO®, Neutrogena®, Earth Perfect and greenSPA™ amenities, AVIVA and WAVE dispensers, Energy Efficient Lighting and Controls, Custom Linen & Towel Re-Use Programs, Green Key Cards, Green Earth Key Cards, Energy Management Systems and Controls, High Performance showerheads, the Nature's Mist™ deodorization system, Zero Odor, and dozens of other products and programs. For more information, please visit www.pineapplehospitality.net, or call us at 636-922-2285.

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