

Refreshing Leadership - Four Carlson Hotels Worldwide locations join FreshStay(R)

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Albert Einstein said, 'Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means.' As a leader in the hospitality industry, Minneapolis-based Carlson Hotels Worldwide is setting an example and influencing others by promoting healthy lifestyles through a 100% smoke-free environment.

The four most-recent hotel members to join FreshStay's ranks of more than 3,500 guaranteed smoke free properties around the United States, Canada and the world, are affiliated with the Carlson's hotel brands. These new members include:

Radisson Plaza Hotel Minneapolis,

Radisson Hotel Central Dallas,

Radisson Hotel Salt Lake City Downtown, and

Country Inn & Suites by Carlson, San Diego.

'Carlson Hotels is in the process of developing an environmental initiative that is part of our Responsible Business efforts. One of our top priorities is to find ways to improve indoor air quality, improve conservation of energy and water, and focus on providing guests with a clean, healthy environment for their stays,' says Carmen Baker, vice president of Responsible Business for Carlson Hotels Worldwide.

'FreshStay helps hotel members reach the growing number of business and leisure travelers who prefer to stay in smoke-free facilities,' she adds.

FreshStay is the most comprehensive online directory of smoke-free lodging properties in the world. FreshStay makes it easy for today's travelers to find and book the accommodations they desire, with a search function that lists member hotels by state and in alphabetical order, and an integrated booking process that lets guests book their stays directly from the Web site.

The Industry Standard

'Consumers are speaking up and letting hotel owners and managers know that they will no longer tolerate stale, smoke-ridden rooms,' says Ray Burger, president of Pineapple Hospitality, which operates FreshStay. 'It's not just people with allergies or chemical sensitivities who are demanding this. It's everyone. That's why we like to say FreshStay is dedicated to Frequent Breathers everywhere.'

'We're excited to see the efforts and leadership from Carlson Hotels in making smoke-free lodging not just a niche, but the industry standard,' Burger adds.

A 2007 study from J.D. Power & Associates found that 82 percent of guests prefer a smoke-free hotel environment - including public areas and guestrooms. That number increased from 79 percent in 2006.

'Today's travelers know what they want, and that is a clean, refreshing place to stay when they are away from home,' Burger says. 'Separating smoking and non-smoking rooms isn't good enough anymore. You still have odors carrying from room to room or floor to floor and you still have public areas that can be permeated with smoke.'

'With the ever-growing number of 100% smoke-free lodging options, if a guest cannot be assured a completely smoke-free environment, then he or she is certainly going to look elsewhere to book his or her reservation,' Burger adds.

No Vacancy for Smokers

Aside from the drive from Carlson to promote a healthy and clean lifestyle among its guests and staff, each property had its own reasons for 'butting out.'

'Our smoking rooms had diminished to nearly none - we just didn't have any demand for them,' says general manager James Courtney from the 100-percent smoke-free Radisson Hotel Salt Lake City Downtown.

With negligible demand for smoking facilities, especially in an area known for its healthy lifestyles and outdoor living, the 381-guest room facility, located adjacent to the Salt Lake City convention center, went smoke free about one year ago. Since then, the property hasn't had a single negative comment about the move. On the contrary, the no smoking policy has helped the hotel attract both overnight guests and users of the hotel's 10,000-plus square feet of meeting space.

'Customers enjoy the facts that they don't have to worry about other smokers, or the odors that linger between rooms and in the hallways,' Courtney says. 'It's a relief to them and to us. The property stays cleaner, and we don't have to deal with damage from smoke or lit cigarettes.'

Guest capacity also was a major reason the Radisson Hotel Central Dallas extinguished its smoking policy.

'Going 100% smoke free was an easy decision,' says Tina Seebaran, director of sales and marketing at the Radisson Hotel Central Dallas. 'Simply put, we had more customers requesting non-smoking rooms than smoking. Our No. 1 priority is to exceed customer expectations, and moving to a 100-percent smoke free hotel is helping us achieve that goal.'

'FreshStay, via its online directory, offers an opportunity to showcase our Radisson to those travelers who prefer a smoke-free environment. Offering a clean, smoke free hotel is a 'win-win' for our customers as well as the hotel and its staff,' Seebaran adds.

Catering to Customers

Judith G. Kalfon, general manager of the Radisson Plaza Hotel Minneapolis, says the 360-room brand flagship in downtown Minneapolis went 100-percent smoke free January 1. And unlike most other New Year's resolutions, this one is going to stick.

The hotel spent an entire month and more than \$20,000 completely refurbishing its fifth floor, the last remaining smoking floor in the hotel. The carpet was shampooed, upholstery replaced, drapes cleaned and walls repainted to eliminate remnants from years of smoking.

'It was the right thing to do, for a lot of reasons,' Kalfon says. 'For one, it reflects our commitment to our guests, providing them a clean and healthy environment. We also occasionally had guests who were forced into smoking rooms when all the non-smoking rooms were booked, and they weren't happy.'

'Most importantly, Minneapolis has numerous medical companies, and the move to 100% smoke-free helps us attract them for meetings and overnight stays,' Kalfon continues. 'It also helps us to partner with local non-profit organizations that deal with health issues, and it attracts other health-conscious businesses and guests.'

Though it's just been a few months, Kalfon says she's heard several positive comments, especially from her staff.

'Before, it was difficult to find people willing to work on the smoking floor,' she notes. 'Now, it's a pleasure to get off on the elevator at the fifth floor.'

A Room With a View

Wes Lavender, general manager of the Country Inn & Suites - San Diego, offers three compelling reasons why the hotel went 100-percent smoke free.

'We had 30 smoking rooms on the top floor of the hotel. These were great rooms that commanded the best views of the surrounding area,' Lavender says. 'These rooms, however, were the last to be rented in most cases, and went unoccupied in many circumstances, as many guests would prefer not to stay in rooms that reeked of smoke. We were, in essence, losing revenue because these rooms were designated smoking.'

Lavender adds that the property's bottom line was further hurt, as it cost the hotel more to clean and maintain the smoking rooms. Housekeeping had to spend additional time cleaning the damaging residue created by cigarette smoking, and engineering had to repair wall paper, tubs, carpet, upholstery, and much more, damaged by cigarettes.

But even greater than the business aspect was the personal aspect of going smoke-free.

'The well being of our staff was at risk due to their having to spend extended periods of time cleaning smoke filled rooms,' Lavender says. 'In many cases, the housekeepers would prefer not to clean the rooms with the doors closed because of how stuffy and smelly the smoking rooms were.'

'Our 7th floor has been smoke-free for more than two months now, and we have yet to hear one complaint - even from our visitors from overseas,' he adds. 'We have happier guests, a happier staff and a great view from the additional 30 top-floor rooms that are now smoke-free and in high demand!'

About Pineapple Hospitality

Headquartered in Saint Charles, Missouri, Pineapple Hospitality(TM) is The Co-Founder and Host of the ANNUAL GREEN HOSPITALITY CONFERENCE, an EPA ENERGY STAR(TM) partner bringing fresh ideas to hospitality guests' doors and owner/operators' bottom lines - including FreshStay(R) (www.freshstay.com), Environmentally Sensitive Amenities(TM), the greenSPA(TM) luxury amenity and dispenser system, Energy Efficient Lighting and Controls, Custom Linen & Towel Re-Use Programs, Green Key Cards, Guestat(TM) programmable thermostats, High Performance showerheads, the Nature's Mist(TM) deodorization system, and dozens of other products and programs. To get a taste of Pineapple's planet-friendly solutions, please visit www.pineapplehospitality.net, or call us at 636-922-2285.

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