

Ecotourism Pioneer Now Ready to Export 'Trash to Treasures' Idea - By Glenn Hasek  
2008-04-30

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Here at Maho Bay Camps, you have to be careful what you throw away. Your 'trash' just might end up as part of a piece of art on sale to a visiting guest.

For more than 10 years now, glass bottles, aluminum cans, worn tablecloths, napkins, towels, sheets, shredded cardboard and paper, and even laundry lint have been converted into saleable pieces of art as part of Maho Bay Camps' Trash to Treasures program. Last year, the resort sold \$250,000 worth of art made from items otherwise destined for the trash heap.

With the program a proven success, Stanley Selengut, president of Maho Bay Camps Inc., wants to export it to other resorts.

'We could do it pretty easily,' says Selengut, who was recognized for his contributions to the green tourism movement with the International Society of Hospitality Consultants Pioneer Award at this year's Americas Lodging Investment Summit.

### **Artists Transform the Trash**

How does Trash to Treasures work? With the assistance of visiting artists and artists on staff, items such as beer bottles and other glass containers are converted into artistic and practical objects through glass crushing, glass blowing, glass casting and flame working. In a textile studio, worn linens are transformed into a line of green fashions such as sarongs, t-shirts, bandanas, handbags and other accessories.

Potters incorporate shredded office paper and laundry lint with clay to make artistic pieces, and in the metal foundry aluminum cans are cast into sculptures and other products. The output of Trash to Treasures is for sale at the resort's art gallery and gift shop where some glass bowls and vases sell for hundreds of dollars. Selengut says employees whose creations make it to the gallery and gift shop get a 25 percent portion of the sale of their work. Excess crushed glass not used by artists is used as backfill on the island and farmers use surplus shredded cardboard as mulch.

To get a Trash to Treasures program up and running, Selengut estimates a capital cost of \$200,000 to set up a studio with a metal foundry, glass blowing and glass crushing equipment, kilns, annealing ovens, cardboard shredders and other items.

### **From Waste to Wonders**

The advantages to a Trash to Treasures program are many. In addition to removing trash from the waste stream and generating income from art sales, jobs are created for the local community, activities and classes are created for guests, and an atmosphere of entertainment is created as guests watch artists convert waste to wonders. Trash to Treasures also saves energy because recyclables do not have to be shipped by truck. The 'trash' stays on-site and ultimately becomes a valuable asset-an item that guests are willing to pay to have shipped off the island.

Selengut says Trash to Treasures is an ideal concept for a resort chain and specifically for those properties located where Third World populations can benefit.

'It could change the way the entire hospitality industry looks at trash,' Selengut says enthusiastically.

The entrepreneur, who plans to eventually build a Trash to Treasures Art Center at his Concordia resort on St. John, says he would be willing to host any resort representative serious about starting a Trash to Treasures program.

'It is fun and exciting,' he says. 'For the arts community, it is an absolute bonanza. It is also great for the environment.'

To learn more about Trash to Treasures, e-mail Stanley Selengut at [stansel@hamptons.com](mailto:stansel@hamptons.com).

This article first appeared on the Green Lodging News website. To sign up to receive the weekly Green Lodging News newsletter, go to [www.greenlodgingnews.com](http://www.greenlodgingnews.com). Glenn Hasek can be reached at [greenlodgingnews@aol.com](mailto:greenlodgingnews@aol.com).

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