

Hospitality leaders call sustainability a key priority

2008-06-24

Industry, academic leaders address opportunities at panel led by Cornell School of Hotel Administration

More than 150 hospitality leaders from industry, academia and the trade media gathered this month to hear a panel of experts address the need to further develop sustainable business practices.

Hilton Hotels executive and panel member Christopher Corpuel framed the discussion by presenting his definition of sustainability: 'It is addressing your needs today, without negatively impacting your needs for tomorrow,' said Corpuel, vice president of global sustainability for Hilton.

'As we question why we do what we do, we must always ask, 'Is there a better way?'' said David Stipanuk, associate professor at Cornell's School of Hotel Administration and a panel member.

David Jerome, senior vice president of global corporate social responsibility at InterContinental Hotels Group, advised that sustainability must become part of a company's genetic code. 'This goes way beyond towels on the rack,' Jerome said. 'Sustainability should be treated with the same business acumen as everything else.'

Karen Lewis, co-founder of the Lapa Rios Ecodge in Costa Rica, described how her team partnered with the community to build a property in harmony with social and ecological consciousness. Today local natives make up nearly all of the property's staff.



Cornell Hotel School Dean Michael Johnson (left) leads a panel addressing sustainability in the hospitality industry.

'We asked residents if they would learn with us how to run a hospitality business,' said Lewis, who built the property on 1,100 acres of tropical rainforest on the Osa Peninsula in 1990. 'Sustainability to me is about sustaining a community. It's about a better life for our employees' children and grandchildren.'

The panel also debated the merits of sustainability certification. Mark Milstein, director of the Center for Sustainable Global Enterprise for The Johnson School at Cornell University, said that some executives might worry that certification would put them at a competitive disadvantage.

'That's not so bad,' countered Gary Mendell '79, chairman and CEO of HEI Hotels and Resorts. 'I think we would give up competitive advantage in favor of some type of unilateral certification.'

The event, moderated by Cornell Hotel School Dean Michael D. Johnson, was held at the Willard InterContinental in Washington D.C. A forerunner in sustainability, the Willard last fall became the first urban luxury hotel in the nation's capital to be powered by 100 percent wind energy. The hotel recently earned the Environmental Award for Sustainability from the International Hotel & Restaurant Association.

'This series is one of the many ways the School promotes interaction among hospitality executives, our faculty, our alumni, and the news media,' said Dean Johnson. 'We look forward to continuing this conversation at the next panel, to be held on November 11, 2008, during the International Hotel/Motel & Restaurant Show in New York City.'

Photos from the event can be [accessed here](#). This marked the second event in the school's Dean's Leadership Series.

About The Center for Hospitality Research

A unit of the Cornell School of Hotel Administration, The Center for Hospitality Research (CHR) sponsors research designed to improve practices in the hospitality industry. Under the lead of the center's 71 corporate affiliates, experienced scholars work closely with business executives to discover new insights into strategic, managerial and operating practices. The center also publishes the award-winning hospitality journal, the Cornell Hospitality Quarterly (formerly the Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly). To learn more about center and its projects, visit www.chr.cornell.edu.

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This article comes from Hotel News Resource

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