

# Room for improvement

State's green lodging certification program attracts more than 100 businesses

BY DEREK RICE

**W**ith 111 participants, Maine's Certified Environmental Leaders in Hospitality program is building awareness of environmentally friendly practices in the hospitality sector — and savings businesses thousands of dollars in the process.

Created in 2006, the free program oper-

range in size from small bed and breakfasts to large chain hotels. Bar Harbor has the largest number of certified properties, with eight, while Ogunquit and Camden follow with seven and six, respectively.

Upon certification, participants receive flags and decals to display on their property, a logo for marketing purposes and listings on the Maine Tourism Association and Maine Office of Tourism websites.

arduous, says Sarah Diment, owner of the Beachmere Inn in Ogunquit. She spent nearly two years preparing the paperwork and addressing the program's criteria before earning certification about a year ago.

While Beachmere underwent a significant expansion during those two years, Diment installed an ozone washing system that produces hot water through solar energy. While not a state-of-the-art tech-

nology, she says it's "new-ish" to the hospitality industry. When she conducts green tours of the property, for guests the system is always the highlight, she says.

Green initiatives and the state certification can help increase a property's bottom line, Diment says. "People want to know who's green, and they're willing to search out green properties," she says. "With certification, you immediately receive a valuable marketing piece — but you have to tell people what you're doing."

Certified in August 2008, the Portland Marriott at Sable Oaks in South Portland can attest to the program's potential cost savings. "Our decision to become an Environmental Leader was not only an environmental decision, but also an economic decision," says Ed Palmer, the hotel's general

manager. "We've seen savings through the first quarter of approximately \$3,900 in trash removal through recycling, and \$27,600 in electricity and natural gas savings through conservation and purchasing more efficient equipment."

While results like this are possible, they are not necessarily typical. Diment warns anyone who's thinking green initiatives will provide an immediate financial windfall to re-evaluate their expectations. "You're not going to make money the minute you start a green program," she says. "There is a lot of up-front investment required to do it right. For example, reducing our oil consumption has been a direct benefit of our solar laundry system, but we won't see the payback on that for a while."

The Blue Hill Inn was one of the first properties to earn its certification. Since tak-

## Carbon count

**T**he Maine Department of Environmental Protection estimates that the certification program's 111 participants have made the following yearly reductions:

- **18,765,383** Gallons of water, through low-flow water fixtures and towel/linen re-use programs
- **12,017,709** Kilowatts of electricity, or 108,268 kilowatts per business
- **\$1,207,173** Saved through electricity reduction initiatives, or \$10,875 saved per business
- **17,411,372** Pounds of green house gas emissions from lighting with CFLs
- **1,165,847** Pounds of solid waste by composting food waste
- **1,544,936** Pounds of solid waste by recycling
- **325,872** Bottles saved by installing refillable amenity dispensers
- **19,552** Pounds of plastic
- **9,635** Pounds of cleaning chemicals, 1,631 of which would be considered toxic or hazardous

ing over the already-certified property in 2007, current owner Sarah Pebworth has maintained the program and in the last three years added composting, serving only organic coffee, purchasing eggs locally, using no-VOC paint wherever possible and using organic cotton and bamboo linens. "For us, the certificate isn't something to pursue, as much as it is recognition for being smart business owners," she says.

Her inn's certification has had a direct impact on its business, Pebworth says. "We've definitely reached more like-minded guests by having the logo on our website," she says.

Certification is valid for two years before properties must apply for renewal. Because businesses are expected to keep up with their green initiatives, they have to meet increasingly stringent requirements to maintain their certification. "We want them to demonstrate that they're improving on what they've already been doing," Cooke says. "They need to have 130 points for the first renewal and 150 for the second."

Pebworth does have one wish before her property is due for re-certification next year. "I'm hoping Toyota offers a Prius convertible by the time I need to re-apply," she says.

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*Sarah Diment, owner of the Beachmere Inn in Ogunquit, says being certified in the state's environmental leaders program has helped reach green-minded guests*

ates under the Maine Department of Environmental Protection's Pollution Prevention Program, which also offers certification for restaurants and grocery stores. Participating lodging businesses have saved an average of \$10,000 per year in electricity costs alone, according to the DEP. So far, seven states have replicated the program.

Peter Cooke, DEP pollution prevention manager who oversees both the hospitality and restaurant programs, says that while certification can bring a number of benefits to hospitality owners, that isn't the program's main goal. "We're not an awards program," he says. "Essentially, we're a technical assistance program. We want to help businesses find ways to reduce their impact on the environment."

The program's certified hospitality properties represent all areas of the state and

Properties applying for certification evaluate themselves on a number of criteria, including the use of green cleaning products, recycling programs and energy efficiency. Businesses receive a certain number of points for each item and must achieve 100 points to be certified. Cooke reviews every application and conducts random checks to ensure properties are meeting the criteria.

Properties that fall short of 100 points can still earn provisional certification, Cooke says. "If they can't find enough points, we can award them provisional certification, and they'll have three months to get to 100," he says. "But if they can't find the points, we want them to call us for help."

### Making a commitment

The application process can be long and