

State markets hotels to green-minded guests

Marriott at University of Maryland is first in year-old tourism program

by Lindsey Robbins | Staff Writer

State tourism officials hope to use the public's growing interest in the green movement as a powerful marketing tool.

The Marriott Inn & Conference Center, University of Maryland University College in Adelphi is the first business to be named a Maryland Green Travel Partner. The state launched its Green Travel Program in 2009 — complete with a 20-member advisory group — to review, certify and showcase tourism businesses committed to reducing their environmental impact.

"Quite a few consumers are only interested in green accommodations," said Margot Amelia, executive director of the state tourism office. "This will be a benefit to hotels since we'll have a place to direct consumers to what they do. We're going to be able to market this."

Nearly 59 million Americans say they would pay more to use a green travel company, with 61 percent saying they would pay up to 10 percent more, according to the tourism office.

"It was natural fit for us," said Michael McCarthy, general manager for the Marriott hotel and conference center, which was named a Green Travel Partner last week. "We already do more than most hotels do."

The hotel launched its green program in 2004 after building its 127-room addition and becoming the first hotel in the country to receive Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. Since 2008, the hotel has reduced the solid waste it sends to landfills to 47 percent from 65 percent and increased the amount of waste recycled to 21 percent from 11 percent.

"We wanted to be the best lean facility in the Washington area," McCarthy said, adding that Marriott International of Bethesda plans to reduce its total water, energy and waste use by 25 percent by 2018.

"Marriott has taken the lead in sustainability globally," Amelia said.

The Inn at Herrington Harbour in Rose Haven was the second to be named a Maryland Green Travel Partner.

Amelia said she hopes the current partners and the 25 hotels that have also applied for the designation will encourage others in the state to adopt sustainable practices. She said participation has been particularly low in Western Maryland.

The program requires participants to have recycling programs, list what they recycle, provide ways to minimize disposable waste in its food service and list three other waste-reduction activities. She said the state's program was inspired by a similar one in Virginia.

"Usually, when companies make these changes, it's not only the 'right' thing to do, but they end up saving money," Amelia said. She said bed-and-breakfasts are way ahead of other lodging facilities in this regard and "convention managers are coming on strong with this."

The program supplements the Maryland: Smart, Green and Growing initiative and the Green Business Registry of the state's environment department.

Restaurants and tourist attractions are the next element of the program, Amelia said. The restaurant component is being designed in conjunction with a national program.

"Any of these programs are useful for marketing," said Paul Hartgen, president of the Restaurant Association of

Maryland, emphasizing that sustainability is becoming a major focus of the industry. "The more we educate consumers and businesses, the better we'll all be."

Restaurants have added incentive to adopt green practices since the launch of a Baltimore Gas & Electric program, he said.

About 1,000 small businesses, including restaurants, have benefited from the company's Small Business Lighting Solutions, which provides free energy audits and 80 percent of the total cost for most energy-efficiency lighting retrofit projects. The program started in April 2009 and applies to businesses using 60 kilowatts per hour or less.

"A lot of businesses have already benefited, but we want more to participate," said Ruth Kiselewich, director of BGE's energy efficiency programs. "We're trying to be sensitive as to the cost of these programs for businesses ... We know many small businesses don't have an energy manager."

The program also has recently seen a surge among nonprofits applying for the service, said Bill Wolf, manager of the industrial and commercial conservation program.

"When you begin to see your competitors having success with sustainability, it's human nature to get into the game," Amelia said.