

TSW's Green Issue: Pushing the Venue

Eco-conscious show managers are asking for – and getting – convention centers to go the extra green mile with environmental measures.

By Lisa Plummer -- Tradeshow Week, 4/19/2010

As the environmental movement continues to capture the tradeshow industry's imagination, with several eco-conscious events intensifying their sustainable practices year after year, more venues are being expected to meet bigger and greener demands.

And, as show organizers become more sophisticated about sustainability and request facilities to not only have green practices in place, but also conduct more advanced initiatives during events, many venues now must meet higher standards than ever before.

Two tradeshows at the forefront of the greening movement, New Hope Natural Media's **Natural Products Expo West/Supply Expo** and **Natural Products Expo East/Organics Products Expo-Biofach America**, aren't afraid to ask for more from their venues when it comes to sustainable practices.

Held annually at the Anaheim Convention Center and Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, respectively, the events for the eco-conscious, natural and organic products industry are on a mission, according to Erica Stone, Natural Products East show manager.

“What we generally do is push our initiatives upon our vendors,” Stone said. “We work closely with our trash people, decorator and catering vendor to provide options for people that are in line with our green practices. The inherence of the greening efforts in our product set is already there ... so it's extremely important for us to walk the walk.”

At the most recent events, which took place Sept. 23-26 in Boston and March 11-14 in Anaheim, both venues stepped up to the plate by helping to implement advanced showfloor recycling and composting; organic and vegetarian food options in catering; natural and organic sweeteners and drinks; biodegradable and compostable utensils, containers and trays in concessions; and eco-friendly hand sanitation units, according to Stone.

Natural Products West manager Adam Andersen said the facilities have been great partners to the events and continue to demonstrate their own growing commitments to sustainability.

“Anaheim has been a good partner in the sense that we've pushed them in the direction and they've taken it a bit further,” he added. “Last summer, they actually purchased a herd of grass-fed beef. They're also hoping to have a composting program in place for our show next year, and the building is pursuing (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design existing building) certification.”

Housing Natural Products East also has been a motivator for the BCEC, according to James E. Rooney, executive director of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, which oversees the venue. Inspired by the event's advanced showfloor recycling system that featured dedicated bins and composting, as well as signage to educate attendees, BCEC decided to integrate some of these practices into its own operations, Rooney said.

“While we've always been avid recyclers as an organization, after NPEE we recognized the importance of implementing our own composting plan and have been consciously working to compost more of our food product waste in the kitchen and back of house,” he added. “We also liked the way NPEE used specific recycling bins for paper and bottle products. We now have our own bins that are designed to specifically show attendees what types of products can be recycled in each one.”

At least partially as a result, BCEC and the John B. Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center have been able to attract additional eco-conscious events, including **Down:2:Earth** and the **Conference On Clean Energy**, Rooney said. BCEC also plans to support Natural Products East in its efforts to go paperless at its upcoming event in October by attempting to do the same as a facility, he added.

Another venue willing to accept the challenges of more environmentally demanding customers is Denver's Colorado Convention Center, which steadily has implemented its own sustainability program during the past few years.

As the recent host to several environmentally progressive events, such as the U.S. Green Building Council's **Greenbuild Intl. Expo & Conference** in 2006 and the Democratic Natl. Convention in 2008, the facility has come to understand the nuts and bolts of carrying out a truly green event.

This growing commitment to sustainability has helped the venue attract other eco-conscious shows and conferences, including the **Assn. for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education**, scheduled to hold its biennial conference Oct. 10-12 at the Colorado CC.

As an organization whose mission is to advance sustainability in higher education, selecting a venue willing and able to implement a host of sustainable practices was not just important, but essential, according to Danielle Gaines, AASHE events manager.

“Sustainability is literally AASHE's middle name, and the first responsibility above all in any of our programs, resources or events,” Gaines said. “It's a natural fit to plan an event where anybody that's involved in the production side is able to contribute to the overall green initiative, so it really allows us to have a platform to highlight the actual experience of sustainability through our conference.”

With a host of initiatives either established or underway, including rooftop solar panels, advanced recycling and back-of-house composting, water and energy conservation practices, local and organic catering options, as well as its LEED EB certification in process, Gaines said the Colorado CC was a perfect fit for AASHE.

According to Lindsay Smith, Colorado CC sustainable programs manager, one of several green initiatives AASHE requested for its upcoming event is front-of-house composting, a practice the facility first carried out for the DNC and also for **The SnowSports Industries America Snow Show**, held at the facility earlier this year. Unlike other green practices, this particular effort requires a strong partnership with the show, including a staff of volunteers to oversee the process, Smith said.

But, by partnering in these efforts with progressive events such as AASHE, she added, the benefits are two-fold: the facility helps the show achieve its goals, while the venue enhances its own green program.

“The biggest hurdles (to new practices) are staff training, infrastructure, communication and show buy-in,” Smith said. “When you get those areas straightened out, it doesn't matter what the show is.”

Another venue that has been pushed to go above and beyond for some of its green events is the Phoenix Convention Center. As last year's host of Greenbuild, an event known for its extensive green requirements, the Phoenix CC was asked to stretch its

existing environmental practices by adopting, among other things, composting and sorted recycling on the showfloor. The show composted 12.3 tons of food; recycled 22.56 tons of aluminum, glass and plastic; and diverted 23.58 tons of cardboard, according to Cynthia Weaver, Phoenix CC director of communications.

A progressive sustainability program and LEED silver certification has enabled the PCC to compete for and land more events, including **GreenSummit**, **Southwest Build-It-Green Expo & Conference**, **Natl. Apartment Assn. Green Conference & Exhibition** and **EUEC Energy & Environment Conference & Expo**, according to Weaver.