

Green Giant



WRITTEN BY ROSANNA CAIRA



Minto Suite Hotel is investing time and energy to inspire and propel a green revolution

In 2008, Kostuch Publications Ltd. presented its first Green Leadership Award to Fairmont Hotels & Resorts. Last year, foodservice giant Aramark Ltd. joined the winners' circle. In a bid to expand the program to recognize winners from both foodservice and the hotel industry, Kostuch is proud to present the 2010 Green Leadership Award in the hotel category to the Ottawa-based Minto Suite Hotel. Hotelier recently caught up with Andrew Pride, vice-president of the Minto Green Team, to discuss the company's greening efforts.

Hotelier: When did your company decide to give green initiatives a higher profile?

Andrew Pride: Minto has been a pioneer in the green-building industry for the past 25 years, with programs such as Energy Wise and building homes to R-2000 standards. In 1999, Minto took things a step further by tracking and reducing our energy and water consumption using sophisticated software and a comprehensive natural resource-management program.

How did you come up with your program's name?

In 1999, Minto created a division dedicated to implementing energy-efficient initiatives into its apartment portfolio, called Minto Energy Management. This team then began focusing on innovation for each of Minto's operating groups, including Minto Suite Hotel. "Thinking Green... Living Greener" was created to inspire green culture change throughout the company. Today, that dedicated division is known as the Minto Green Team.

Are you the first vice-president of the Minto Green Team?

Yes. I began with Minto in 1999 and I'm now VP of the Minto Green Team. George Van Noten (pictured above) is vice-president of Minto Hospitality Group, and he leads the charge at Minto Suite Hotel.

What's the focus of the program?

Our focus is to measure and report on our various green initiatives and celebrate our successes. We're trying to inspire a "culture of green" to reduce our impact on the environment.

Of particular note, Minto Suite Hotel has rejuvenated its motion-activated suite heating and cooling controls; installed energy-efficient lighting and compact fluorescent lamps, switched to low-flow toilets, added motion sensors as well as a series of other eco-friendly initiatives. New programs have evolved to help provide guests with healthier and more enjoyable lifestyles. Some of those include using environmentally friendly cleaning products; a free bike-share program; a hybrid car-share program; community movie nights and weekly runs through the city as well as

an employee recognition awards program for green achievements.

How much money have you spent implementing this program, and what have been the biggest challenges and benefits?

Overall, The Minto Group has invested \$17 million in innovation technologies over the past decade, which has helped foster both financial and cultural benefits. The savings have provided an excellent return on investment and the effort has demonstrated the company's commitment to the environment. Minto Suite Hotel still attracts the usual guests — tourists, businesspeople and government patrons — but with all its green features, environmental associations and eco-minded guests are now frequenting the hotel.

Recently, there's been accelerated growth in corporate greening, propelled by today's discerning customers. Where does your company want to go in this area?

For the past decade, Minto has been on a journey to change the green culture within the company. Our employees today are inspired, and they're propelling that momentum forward, while customers are now starting to appreciate and demand a higher level of sustainability. The staff at Minto Suite Hotel is inspired by George's leadership and they work each day to enhance our green programs.

How have you worked with Minto employees to implement these initiatives, and how would you rate the process?

Minto has created a philosophy of 'beinspired,' which was generated by staff at Minto Suite Hotel. Implementing our green programs has had its challenges, but those have been far outweighed by the benefits we've seen in hotel performance, our guest satisfaction levels and in employee morale.

To that end, the staff at Minto Suite Hotel demonstrates environmental practices every day. We have created company-wide voluntary green committees to inspire employees and encourage new resource-saving initiatives throughout the company. Select hotel employees are active members of these committees and they encourage others to participate in green events.

Hotel staff members were also part of an initiative that aided in the tracking and reporting of the hotel's resource consumption to be included in Minto's environmental report. Hotel staff also implemented a weekly "beinspired" newsletter, which offers helpful tips on living greener and being healthy.

Has it been difficult to deliver your green message to customers and employees alike?

We wanted to make sure we were internally focused on sustainability, before we engaged our customers. Our employee engagement process includes our internal website and our various green committees. Above and beyond that, all green components in the rooms at Minto Suite Hotel are identified by green apple stickers with an explanation of savings and the benefits to educate guests on our greening efforts. Minto Suite Hotel has also been able to demonstrate our initiatives to international groups by hosting green tours for Chinese, Australian and other overseas delegates.

What is the most innovative aspect of your green program, and did staff buy into it immediately?

As we engaged our employees in a new way of thinking, we were able to achieve a higher level of buy-in. While using new technologies like microturbine cogeneration and in-suite automated controls are innovative, we're most proud of how our employees have embraced our sustainability efforts. The culture change has been huge. By engaging our employees, it has helped us achieve a higher level of sustainability.

Were you successful in integrating the various components of greening (energy efficiency, air and water quality, water conservation, waste minimization and environmental purchasing)?

Our holistic, corporate, environmental approach from the Minto Green Team enabled Minto Suite Hotel to deliver a comprehensive program focused on improving its energy efficiency, air quality, environmental purchasing, waste minimization and water conservation. Having a dedicated green team enables an appropriate balance of guest satisfaction and sustainability. Our hotel employees are focused on our customers, while the green team equips, engages and enables the hotel team with the knowledge and insight to integrate each of the green features and solutions.

What has been the economic impact and cost savings associated with your green practices, in addition to the environmental benefits?

Minto Suite Hotel has seen annual energy savings of 28 per cent and water savings of 38 per cent from the green initiatives we've implemented. That accounts for more than half a million dollars in savings each year, totalling \$1,200 per suite, and it's climbing.

What is the future goal of your sustainability program?

The program is organic, and we strive to stay at least five years ahead of current industry standard operating procedures. We'll continue to embrace employee ideas and innovative products and processes; celebrate our customer's sustainable desires and engage our corporate values. Our hotel is a strong advocate of green and the results derived from collaboration with the other Minto businesses makes the overall company stronger and the world a better place.

Photography by Tony Fouhse