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Nonprofit Matches Hotels, Agencies in Charitable Venture That Reduces Waste

By Glenn Hasek
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One way to reduce costs related to waste removal while keeping waste out of the local landfill is to give away items to those in need. In the lodging industry “waste” can include food, toiletries, partially used rolls of toilet paper, or even guestroom furnishings. Finding the right agency to donate items to can be a challenge. To save time and labor, it has got to be an organization willing to pick up the items. It has also got to be an organization that can be trusted—one that will actually deliver the items to those in need. What is the best way to find that agency?

While attending the recent International Hotel/Motel & Restaurant Show in New York City, I had an opportunity to meet Syd Mandelbaum, founder and CEO of Rock and Wrap It Up! I also spoke with Sharona Thall, national director of public advocacy for the charity. Their organization specializes in matching up hotels with agencies experienced in delivering food and other used items to those in need—not only during the holiday season but year-round. I strongly recommend checking out Rock and Wrap It Up! Their program for hotels is called “Hotel Wrap!”

After many years of working with rock bands, sports teams, schools and the U.S. government, Rock and Wrap It Up! began working with hotels two years ago. Mandelbaum received a call from the secretary of a San Francisco-based lawyer who had stayed at the Grand Hyatt New York in New York City. The lawyer was concerned about what happened to the partially used amenity items at the hotel. A representative from the Grand Hyatt then contacted Rock and Wrap It Up! which then put the hotel in touch with Grand Central Homeless Services. Now the Grand Hyatt donates its half-used toilet paper rolls and toiletries.

California Hotels Participate

“We started branching out to other hotels,” Thall says. Another hotel that began working with Rock and Wrap It Up! was the Langham, Huntington Hotel & Spa in Pasadena, Calif. The hotel’s leftover food and unused toiletries are now donated to Union Station Homeless Services, a social service agency in the San Gabriel Valley that assists homeless and low-income individuals. Other hotels in California are also working with Rock and Wrap It Up!

“Our recent success was at the Marriott Marquis [in New York City],” Mandelbaum said. “We spoke to 150 housekeepers and 40 housemen and staff at a daily morning meeting. “We got them inspired to join the project. We showed them who would be receiving the unfinished rolls of toilet paper and amenities. We learned from some of the housemen that some guests purchase larger containers of shampoo and soap and leave them at the hotel. These items are sometimes almost full. These types of items account for about 20 percent of what we are getting.”

Mandelbaum emphasized that his organization’s goal is to make the donation process seamless for the hotel. He realizes that hotels do not have the space to store food or partially used toiletries, toilet paper or tissue

boxes. From his many years of experience working with agencies throughout the United States, he knows which ones can be relied on to pick up donations.

Experience with Logistics

“We are masters at the logistical end of this,” Mandelbaum said. “We know that the people are actually going to show up and that the agencies will use the items.”

Thall said Hotel Wrap! is a win-win for hotels for a number of reasons. The volume of waste sent to the landfill is reduced, waste removal costs are trimmed, and the program is a morale booster for staff. “Housekeepers and other staff feel good about what they are doing,” she says.

Rock and Wrap It Up! has a small staff and an annual budget of just approximately \$400,000 but thousands of volunteers provide the help that is needed. The organization is currently trying to raise funds through a Win4Hunger campaign. To learn more about Rock and Wrap It Up! and Hotel Wrap!, go to www.win4hunger.org, call (877) 691-3663, or e-mail sydmandelbaum@att.net, or sharona.thall@gmail.com.