

## Hotel, conference go green

BY K KAUFMANN

The Desert Sun

When the California Resource Recovery Association opens its annual conference today at the Rancho Las Palmas Resort and Spa in Rancho Mirage, the bottled water the hotel usually provides for such events will be replaced with pitchers and recyclable cups.

The food served will be mostly organic or locally grown, and the signs and banners normally posted will be replaced with flat-screen televisions.

The theme of the four-day event is “Zero Waste: Vision to Reality,” and organizers say they mean to make good on that challenge, with the event sending no garbage to local landfills.

“One of the things we wanted to do was look at all aspects of the conference,” said Roberta Miller of the StopWaste Partnership, a public/private program in Alameda County. “Everything that we could think of, we went after.”

For example, instead of workshop handouts, conference presentations and materials will be available online, and at the end of the four days, participants will be able to recycle their name tags, Miller said.

“How many of us end up toting bags of paper back to our offices after a confer-



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Reyna Sosa recycles cantaloupe skins while preparing food at the Rancho Las Palmas Resort. The resort has taken a proactive approach in minimizing their carbon footprint, including recycling foods and waste and reducing water use.

ence that we never look at again. That’s a horrible waste of resources,” she said.

The conference program also includes a tour, from the hotel’s kitchen — where executive chef Leanne Kamekona recycles about 85 percent of leftover food, containers and paper — to California Bio-Mass in Thermal, where the food and other organic wastes go for composting.

Kamekona is part of the team at Rancho Las Palmas that has been working with Miller and other conference organizers for a year to make sure the event hits the 100-percent recycled mark, or as close to it as possible.

For Kamekona, that meant planning vegan menus — no meat, fish or

dairy — and more than doubling the organic produce she usually orders, a cost that has been partially balanced by other savings the event is producing for the hotel, she said.

“We’re very conscious of the amount of printing we’re doing,” she said. “Normally we’d print out 4,000 papers, including résumés, work orders, maps. With this group we’ve done 60 percent less.”

The hotel now recycles about 50 percent of its total waste, but planning for the conference has spurred staff to push higher, said Cristina Cascio, director of the spa and recreation.

“It began a process of forming a recycling team,” Cascio said. “We have eight groups within the hotel,

people who make sure we are implementing (recycling) throughout the hotel.”

The resort’s efforts reflect an industry-wide trend toward eco-friendly practices, such as asking guests staying more than one night to reuse towels and keep the same sheets on their beds.

But, while going green has become a key marketing tool for many hotels, most have not moved beyond superficial changes, said Eric Corey Freed of La Quinta, a green architect and author of “Green Building and Remodeling for Dummies.”

“Hotels use 28 million of those tiny little shampoo bottles every day,” Freed said. “Just a 10 percent energy reduction is equal to raising the (average daily rate per room) \$2.45 a day.”

How will the Rancho Las Palmas team and conference organizers know if they’ve made zero-waste a reality? Miller admits measuring success at this point is not an exact science.

“We just frankly have the recycler weigh it and tell us,” Miller said. “You look in the garbage and see what’s there. You can see what I want to tackle next time. How can I find a place to recycle it, or how can I find a way not to generate it in the first place.”

### Greening your conference

**Tips to decrease waste at special events:**

■ **Plan early:** Start working on a recycling plan a year out, identifying sources of waste and ways to minimize their impact or recycle materials that might otherwise go to landfills.

■ **Registration:** Keep it online; ditto pre-conference announcements and correspondence.

■ **Handouts:** Let conference goers know that workshop presentations will be available online, rather than distributing handouts.

■ **Vendors:** Require all merchandise or other freebies handed out to be recyclable and use minimal packaging.

■ **Signage:** Avoid creating signs or banners for one-time use. Conference schedules, sponsorship logos and workshop locations can be broadcast on flat-screen televisions or similar monitors.

■ **Name tags:** Ask participants to return plastic name tag covers at the end of the conference, for reuse at your organization’s future gatherings.

**SOURCE:** Roberta Miller and “Special Event Best Practices Guide,” StopWaste.org