

NMB Chamber is first in S.C. to offer Green Plus program

By Judy Corley

The North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce Convention announced their association with the Green Plus sustainability education and certification program on Tuesday, becoming the first chamber of commerce in South Carolina's to offer the program to small businesses.

North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Marc Jordan said the program is designed to help chamber members put sustainable business practices to work on an everyday basis. The program is not just about recycling, he said, but an entire program which includes human resources and more.

The program will be available to North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce members with five or more employees for \$350. Businesses with one employee can join for \$150. Several North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce members have already signed up as charter members of the chamber's Green Plus Program including Avista Resort, Damon's Grill, Elliott Realty, A&I Fire Water & Restoration, Ocean Drive Beach & Golf Resort and HTC.

"The thing we like about Green Plus is it is a very pro-business green program. This program is aimed at small to medium size businesses that really can't afford what a large corporation can afford to develop a sustainability plan and cope with all the regulations that are coming out and the things businesses will be forced to do," said Jordan. "This is a way to make it affordable and profitable."

Jordan says in the future the word sustainable will be used often and businesses will need to change and adopt a different way of doing business.

"You are going to hear this word in this decade more than any time before and that is sustainability. Our board and our leadership began to focus on the term sustainability over a year ago," he said.

"Most everything we are doing and the programs we are offering here at the chamber stem around the question what does it do for the sustainability of our community, of our businesses and truly for the sustainability of our environment," Jordan said.

Green Plus is a three-part, green and sustainable small business certification and education program giving employers affordable, practical support in succeeding financially while being good to their environment, employees and community. Green Plus gives chambers of commerce a new way to support their small business and non-profit stakeholders.

In the first stage, employers take an online assessment which evaluates their management, environmental, employee and community engagement practices. In the second stage, participants become part of an online network and can receive advice from other business owners and university-based content experts on how to improve their sustainability performance.

The is comprised of public and private university partners, chambers of commerce and philanthropic organizations dedicated to providing smaller employers affordable access to sustainability expertise. In 2008, the Institute's partners received the national Business Civic Leadership Center's Siemens Sustainable Community Award for its effort to build a public-private coalition to advance sustainability.

Employers with exceptional scores across the Green Plus assessment's People, Planet and Performance sections may be Certified Green Plus, recognizing their specific efforts and providing exposure to their current and potential customers and business partners in communities throughout the U.S. and Canada.

The sustainability movement started gaining traction in the United States at the beginning of this decade. Businesses are now recognizing that sustainable value is not only transforming their respective business models but they are now enjoying the fruits of the triple bottom benefits that sustainability yields.

Green Plus was developed by the North Carolina Research Triangle based Institute for Sustainable Development — a combined effort of universities and chambers of commerce to provide smaller employers with affordable tools to improve their triple bottom line sustainability.

The Green Plus model was developed by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler School of Business in 2007. UNC Chapel Hill and Duke University developed online sustainability tools for small business that were tested in Ohio and North Carolina throughout 2008.

The Institute for Sustainable Development partners include The Duke Center for International Development, The Duke University Nicholas School of the Environment, The UNC Center for Global Initiatives, The UNC School of Social Work, The Chapel Hill - Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, The Durham Chamber of Commerce, GlaxoSmithKline and Lenovo.

Jordan says North Myrtle Beach Chamber members will have access to these resources.

"The costs are extremely reasonable for this program. We are the first of any organization in the state of South Carolina to offer the Green Plus program. I think this says something for the chamber's leadership," Jordan said.

Mike Robertson, chairman of the chamber's board of directors said his company was embracing the program and he was encouraging all chamber members to participate. "We are proud to be the first chamber of commerce in South Carolina to offer this green program. This is a valuable tool to provide to our members to help differentiate themselves from their competitors. This is a valuable tool to assist our members to improve their business profitability. This program is really amazing. It is more than recycling cans and bottle" Robertson said.

Jordan said the chamber worked on offering this program for several months and members were already stepping up to join.

"We have been working on this for several months and this is the first public disclosure of the program. The Green Plus members will have access to various on-line media groups and different social networking opportunities," he said.

Jordan says he thinks the program will take on a life of its own and members will easily see a three fold return on their investment in the program.

Rick Elliott, and his company Elliott Realty, is a charter member of the Chamber's Green Plus program and said his company was seeing results.

"In today's economy a penny saved is a penny earned and our small business is a proud to participate in anything that is going to save dollars such as reducing printing, writing on both sides of paper, cutting lights off when they are not being used, and using more Internet marketing and social media. It is just common sense," Elliott explained.

He says his company has been using less print material and going more toward Internet advertising and social media networks as a way to keep Elliott Realty customers informed.

“As part of the Green Plus initiative we certainly look forward to doing additional things and we encourage other businesses and citizens in the community to participate as well,” Elliott said.

Ed Prince, a member of the board of directors, agreed with Elliott and said this was a sensible program designed to benefit small businesses.

“There are a lot of ways to reduce our use of paper and other products. Here at the chamber to reduce our printing and mailing we offer our vacation guide electronically on our Web site. When a person that is green conscientious calls the chamber of commerce and is asking for information we can refer them to the green-friendly Web site and online edition of the guide,” Prince said.

Once someone opens the online edition of the vacation guide they can print off only the information they need instead of receiving a full sized guide.

“But if they still want to be old-school we can mail them a guide,” said Prince.

For more information on this program call the chamber at 843-281-2662.