

## Marking a Milestone

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As it reaches 4,000 members, FreshStay.com offers advice for hotels considering going smoke-free.



**Ray Burger presents a FreshStay member certificate to Natalee Keathley, GM of the St. Charles Comfort Suites.**

While the hospitality industry is forever in flux, one thing that hasn't changed since FreshStay.com's inception in early 2006 is FreshStay's commitment to providing a 100 percent smoke-free environment to Frequent Breathers everywhere. FreshStay.com celebrated its success in connecting healthy travelers with like-minded hotels, motels, inns and B&B's with a reception Aug. 4 at the St. Charles (Mo.) Comfort Suites.

The St. Charles Comfort Suites not only is the latest to join FreshStay's ever-growing ranks of completely non-smoking hotels. The property also marks an industry milestone - it's the 4,000 member of FreshStay.com.

Leaders from FreshStay.com, St. Charles' Chamber of Commerce, the St. Charles Comfort Suites, and other industry members were on hand to commemorate the thousands of peaceful, refreshing, smoke-free nights booked through FreshStay.com during the past five years.

'Going smoke-free was the best move we have ever made,' says Natalee Keathley, General Manager of the St. Charles Comfort Suites. 'It helps us focus on the needs and comforts of our guests and simplifies our operations and reservations.'

'I believe that eventually all hotels will go smoke-free since that seems to be the trend among other areas of hospitality,' Keathley adds. 'We rarely have any negative feedback about being smoke-free. Even our guests who smoke don't mind stepping outside. For the most part, our guests respect and love the smoke-free environment we provide - even our smoking guests.'

Though the St. Charles Comfort Suites is the newest FreshStay.com member, Keathley says the property already has reaped a number of benefits from going 100% non-smoking. Keathley hopes other hotels consider doing the same.

'I strongly encourage other hotels to become smoke-free,' she says. 'It creates a simple reservation process and cleaner environment for employees and guests. Plus, there is less wear and tear in guest suites due to the elimination of smoke damage and burns.'



**From left to right are:  
Ray Burger,  
FreshStay.com founder;  
Natalee Keathley, GM of the  
St. Charles Comfort Suites;  
John Gieseke, Brand  
Performance Consultant,  
Choice Hotels  
International; and  
Dave Janicke, CBO —  
Chief Breathing Officer —  
for FreshStay.**

### **Changing with the Times**

As it has grown from one to now-4,000 members, FreshStay.com has become faster and easier to use. FreshStay.com has simplified its hotel search options by state and added an integrated booking option, letting guests book directly from the site.

In the near future, FreshStay expects even more changes, adding elements that will indicate hotels offering indoor air quality enhancements in addition to being 100 percent non-smoking.

'The environment certainly has changed over the past few years as the public, the government and the hospitality industry have all taken steps toward socially responsible travel by eliminating smoking indoors,' says Dave Janicke, the CBO - Chief Breathing Officer - of FreshStay.com.

'With our legions of FreshStay members leading the way, and the backing of major hotel chains across the globe that have banned smoking at their properties - brands such as Comfort Suites, Marriott and Westin - I'm pleased to report we are truly moving toward a cleaner, healthier future,' Janicke says. 'The times have certainly changed. Even smokers want to stay at FreshStay properties today.'

### **Tenured Tips**

Marking its 4,000 member, some of FreshStay.com's longest-tenured members joined in celebrating the major industry milestone and shared how they've succeeded by snuffing out smoking.

### **Stonehurst Place**

At Atlanta's Stonehurst Place, an eco-friendly bed-and-breakfast and historic inn, going smoke-free has tied into its environmental message. Guests are very enthusiastic about Stonehurst's no smoking policy and its use of organic products.

'Consumers are more savvy than ever about health matters and their travel, and feel better dedicating a tight travel budget to properties like Stonehurst Place that provide superior value and luxury accommodations in a healthy environment,' says Stonehurst Places' Designer/Owner Barb Shadomy. 'Our eco-friendly housekeeping program, enhanced by our smoke-free environment, ensures Stonehurst Place guests with asthma, allergies and chemical sensitivities have refreshing stays.'

Shadomy says Stonehurst Place constantly is on the look-out for improved eco-friendly products to incorporate into its housekeeping and guest amenity programs, and that FreshStay.com helps the property keep up to date on the very latest eco-friendly industry developments and new products.

Plus, since becoming a member, FreshStay.com is consistently in the list of top 10 referring Web sites that drive traffic to the hotel.

'For hotels considering going smoke-free, besides saying to them 'Do it!,' my best advice comes from experience gained in renovating Stonehurst Place, our historic, luxury bed-and-breakfast inn,' Shadomy says. 'We considered how to improve air quality from every perspective we could think of, including low-VOC paints and finishes, minimal carpeting and rugs, HVAC systems, cleaning products and more. Prospective smoke-free properties should do the same and push forward doing all they can to improve indoor air quality.'

'Our decisions at Stonehurst Place were based on what would create a healthy environment for us and for our guests,' Shadomy adds. 'Because antiques contribute to the historic feel of Stonehurst Place we kept pieces used at the inn before renovation, but made sure to remove and properly clean the antiques of any prior smoke contamination before returning them to service.'

### **Comfort Suites**

In May 2007, all Comfort Suites brand hotels became 100 percent smoke-free, per company policy. With more than 430 U.S. hotels at the time, this was a huge move for the company, and it has paid off.

'Going smoke free was a decision made to ensure the quality of each guest stay,' says John Gieseke, Brand Performance Consultant with Comfort Suites' franchisor/

parent company. Choice Hotels International. 'Even with designated smoking rooms, guests still had to deal with smoke in hallways, common areas and smoke permeating from room to room.'

'Now, each guest is guaranteed fresh air with the non-smoking policy,' Gieseke notes. 'The fact that Comfort Suites is geared toward a higher number of business-class travelers, our smoke-free policy has been well received. Families have responded in a very positive way to the smoke-free policy. Those traveling with kids appreciate the fact their kids will not be exposed to smoke.'

Gieseke says non-smokers represent around 80 percent of the population. Plus, even many smokers are receptive to the change of policy and prefer stays at smoke-free hotels. The key is to set the expectation and explain the smoke-free policy.

Since going smoke-free, Comfort Suites have found many benefits, including:

The reduction of operating costs associated with smoking-related cleaning and maintenance and the elimination of annual costs of replacing items damaged due to smoke or cigarette burns;

Reduced liability and decreased insurance costs; and

Brand differentiation as Comfort Suites is one of the first mid-scale brands to market a 100 percent smoke-free environment.

'For us, the days of selling out of non-smoking rooms only to disappoint a non-smoking guest who has to take a smoking room are over,' Gieseke says. 'Hoteliers should look at the number of times they are selling out of non-smoking rooms. If this number is large enough, they should look at becoming a smoke-free hotel. Keeping a supply of smoking rooms that need to be refreshed over and over again to accommodate a non-smoker becomes cost prohibitive versus creating a smoke-free environment.'

### **Golden Arrow and The Ambrose**

Jenn Holderied says guest complaints at the Golden Arrow Lakeside Resort in Lake Placid, N.Y., dropped dramatically in 2002, which not-coincidentally was the year the hotel went smoke-free. The Golden Arrow has been with FreshStay since the start, and has seen how the industry, and the world, has changed its attitudes toward smoking.

'About a year or two after we went smoke free, the state declared that smoking was no longer permitted in bars or restaurants,' says Holderied, the property's director of PR & marketing. 'A few years later, the Marriott chain made big news by taking the entire franchise smoke free. The trend is moving toward healthier, greener lifestyles. Smoking just doesn't jive with that.'

The Ambrose hotel in Santa Monica, Calif., opened as a non-smoking property in 2003. And, like many others, being some-free ties hand-in-hand with operating as a greener, sustainable hotel.

'Operating a smoke-free hotel has never been an issue for us, since we've been that way from the start,' says Ambrose's Owner Deirdre Wallace. 'Most guests - including smokers - appreciate a smoke-free environment, especially in the rooms they sleep in.'

Whether a hotel is considering going smoke-free as a new hotel or post-renovation, these FreshStay.com veterans says it's key to be upfront about your policy and really drive home the healthy message in everything you do. And, being part of FreshStay.com certainly helps get that message across - while helping you bolster online bookings.

'When we converted the resort to 100% non smoking, we called every guest with an upcoming reservation to let them know about the change,' says Holderied. 'We posted our new policy on our Web site and sent out press releases. We have guests acknowledge they know our smoke-free policy by initialing by the rule at check-in, and we have signage in our guestrooms. We advertise ourselves far and wide as a smoke-free resort. It's something to be proud of - and an advantage to be protected.'



***Natalee Keathley (second from the right), GM of the St. Charles Comfort Suites, and some of her co-workers celebrate the property recently becoming FreshStay's 4,000<sup>th</sup> member.***

### **About Pineapple Hospitality**

Headquartered in Saint Charles, Missouri, Pineapple Hospitality(TM) is an EPA ENERGY STAR(TM) partner bringing fresh ideas to hospitality guests' doors and owner/operators' bottom lines - including FreshStay(R) ([www.freshstay.com](http://www.freshstay.com)), EcoRooms & EcoSuites ([www.EcoRooms.com](http://www.EcoRooms.com)) Environmentally Sensitive Amenities(TM), EO(R), Neutrogena(R), Earth Perfect and greenSPA(TM) amenities, AVIVA and WAVE dispensers, Energy Efficient Lighting and Controls, Custom Linen & Towel Re-Use Programs, Green Key Cards, Green Earth Key Cards, Energy Management Systems and Controls, High Performance showerheads, the Nature's Mist(TM) deodorization system, Zero Odor, and dozens of other products and programs. For more information, please visit [www.pineapplehospitality.net](http://www.pineapplehospitality.net), or call us at 636-922-2285.

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