

Greener Events Company: Lori Hill Event Productions

After graduating from the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland and The Event Management Program at The George Washington University, Lori Hill founded her own highly successful event management company in the Washington, DC, area, Lori Hill Event Productions (<http://lorihillevents.com>).

She has produced high-profile events for the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Freedom House, the Mexico Tourism Board, and the United States Green Building Council (USGBC), and is also a proud 14-year member of the International Special Events Society (ISES) (www.ises.com). When Hill served as president of the Greater Washington, DC, chapter of ISES, it won chapter of the year.

An industrious entrepreneur, Hill is also an environmentalist. It was not until she watched Al Gore's 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, though, that she realized that she could apply environmentalism to her burgeoning event management business. She recalls, "I was inspired by *An Inconvenient Truth* and realized that I needed to practice sustainability, because events can be so wasteful. I realized how much excess there was in the world and asked, 'Do we really need all this stuff to make our point?' We really need to change our priorities."

Initially, Hill offered her clients environmental services as add-ons to the basic event

management package, but it wasn't long before she dedicated her entire company full-time to producing greener meetings and events. "About a year after I started offering green alternatives, I realize that protecting the planet is not an "a la carte" item or a part-time job," Hill says. "Protecting the planet is a full-time job and we need to do it with our every action."

For Hill, sustainable event management means "looking at every single component of the event, including the invitation, venue, floral, menu, entertainment, waste disposal, guest gifts, name badges, signage and lighting, and ensuring that you are choosing the most sustainable options possible."

Hill's beautifully designed greener events feature beeswax (rather than petroleum) candles, locally grown organic food, and organic cotton t-shirts. Disposable tableware and bottled water are banned, and in their place are china and silverware, ceramic mugs, cloth napkins and linens, and filtered tap water. Condiments are purchased in bulk rather than individual packages, and excess food is distributed to client, staff, or a local soup kitchen. Linen and floral containers are returned to vendors for reuse, and soiled linens are stored in canvas, rather than plastic, bags.

Hill has a similarly ambitious agenda for greener meetings. She uses flash drives instead of three-ring binders and 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper with vegetable or

soy-based ink. Signage, badges, and lanyards are reused, and all paper is recycled. “For events with exhibitors, we encourage them to bring only the quantities they need and to print on both sides with recycled paper. We also to encourage them to provide Earth-friendly giveaways.”

Hill laments the number of disposable giveaways distributed at meetings and events, and works with clients to reform this practice. “If a client wants to provide a guest gift, we ask them if it is absolutely necessary to provide a gift,” she says. “If it is a must, we encourage them to provide a gift that is useful, such as a flash drive or notepad made of recycled paper. We also try to support manufacturers in the U.S. versus overseas manufacturers that ship their products thousands of miles.”

A commitment to the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit is one key to Lori Hill’s success. She believes in being good to people, saying, “I mostly work with independent contractors and pay them a fair wage. I believe in paying people for their work. I don’t have unpaid internships.” Hill’s environmental policies show that she believes in being good to the planet, and all of this is good for her profits. “My company is becoming known as a green event producer, one of a few in the area,” she says, “and clients often choose to work with us because we produce green events. We also work with other green vendors to help improve the green economy.”

Hill has produced sustainable events for clients of widely differing backgrounds. “Some clients choose us because we are green and

some clients have been with us before we went green,” she says. “Then there are clients who hear about us without knowing that we are green, but who are really excited when they hear about all the things we do. That is very encouraging.”

Indeed, Hill has received tremendous feedback from clients since going green. “They love it! I can’t begin to tell you how many people tell me that I have inspired them to go green,” she says, naming a caterer and event professionals, as well as regular citizens. “Just the other day, I had a fellow event planner tell me that she picked a plastic water bottle out of a trash can so that she could take it home to recycle it. She saw me do this two months ago. I’ve been doing my best to spread the gospel of green and it is so wonderful to know that I am getting through to people! It makes my day.”

“When we co-produced the Mid-Atlantic Green Wedding Showcase, we received lots of positive feedback about what we were doing,” Hill says. “People said, ‘You are doing a great service.’ It is a no-brainer to us.”

Hill suggests that those event planners interested in going green, “start out by aiming for the low-hanging fruit (the easy things) and move on from there. Your clients will be impressed by what you are doing.” She also cautions, “You need to hop of this bandwagon now or you’ll get run over. As the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy says, ‘In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.’ Enough said” (Hill, interview, March 2010).