



GIVING BACK Surplus Good

by Barbara Palmer

A new program at the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center cuts waste while benefiting community programs.

It's a dilemma familiar to many planners at the end of a meeting or trade show: There's no doubt that somebody could use the inevitable leftovers - conference bags, snacks, pens, notebooks, product samples, even furniture - but without the right contacts and a way to transport them locally, they go straight to recycling or the trash.

The Boston Convention & Exhibition Center (BCEC) has come up with a solution to this problem: the Conventions C.A.R.E (Community Assistance by Responsible Events) program, which was launched last April. The Massachusetts Convention Center Authority (MCCA), which owns and operates the BCEC, systematically collects nonperishable items at the end of exhibitions and meetings, sorts them, and arranges for them to be transported to a network of nonprofit organizations throughout the city.

The Yankee Dental Congress, which brought more than 26,000 dentists and dental-industry professionals and suppliers to Boston last January, served as a very successful pilot project for the program. The organization donated 8,400 show bags, 131 boxes of latex gloves, and 2,746 toothbrushes to Conventions C.A.R.E., which sent the items - with an estimated value of \$8,000 - to four local nonprofits. Since then, according to James Rooney, MCCA's executive director, 19 more meetings and exhibitions have participated in Conventions C.A.R.E., donating more than 35 tons of goods.

Included in that number are items donated by exhibitors at the Boulder, Colo.-based Natural Products Expo East - one of the nation's largest exhibitions of organic and natural products, whose 2010 show was held at the BCEC on Oct. 13-16.

For Erica Stone, Expo East's show manager, working with local food banks to donate leftover food at the end of her event has always been a given. But, Stone said, food makes up only a portion of what remains at the end of Expo East, which also showcases health and beauty products, textiles, pet-food and pet-care products, and many other non-food items.

The real beauty of Conventions C.A.R.E., Stone said, is that MCCA's network of relationships with local nonprofits allows it to accept a variety of products. MCCA's ability to distribute the products also is key, "since we don't live near where we produce the shows," Stone said. "We leave town after the show."

In 2010, donations by Expo East's 950 exhibitors topped 20 tons, and the show's overall recycling diversion rate was 65 percent. Plus, Stone said, MCCA made it easy. During trade-show move-outs, MCCA distributes bright-blue bins to collect products. Convention-services partners pitch in and, if needed, help exhibitors move heavy items, said Rooney.

MCCA program partners include Brede Exposition Services, Champion Exposition Services, Freeman, Global Experience Specialists, JCALPRO Inc., and Teamsters Local 82.

The program may be new, Rooney noted, but the philosophy behind it is not. At the BCEC, he said, "it's always been our practice to contribute to our community. We just needed to organize it."

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Giving Back is sponsored by Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, www.fairmont.com.

Take Away

Saving That Stuff
The Boston Convention & Exhibition

Center has an ongoing partnership with Save That Stuff (www.savethatstuff.com), a 20-year-old waste-management company that specializes in diverting material away from landfills, including pallets, paper, and organic material, which it composts.

All of this can be much more stylish than it sounds. Last fall, Save That Stuff sent leftover banners from the Natural Products Expo East to Newton North High School, in nearby Newton, Mass., where students in a “green-gineering” program turned them into tote and messenger bags.

ON_THE_WEB: For more information about the BCEC’s Conventions C.A.R.E. program, download a PDF of its donation flyer from the recent Yankee Dental Congress at <http://bit.ly/gH8A9O>.