



ON THE GREEN

HOW RICHARD BYFORD IS STEERING THE SPECIAL EVENT WORLD TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

By Blake Holiday

Richard Byford is a man with a vision. He'd like to see some of the biggest events in the country be greener, more sustainable, and ultra eco-friendly. And he's in a position to make it happen. As the owner of Byway Events & Entertainment, Inc., he produces major shindigs around the world like themed galas, launch parties and concerts with celebrity acts such as Jay Leno, Charlie Daniels, or Stringfever, and he's working diligently to prove that special events can be spectacular and fabulous, while reducing waste and leaving a low carbon footprint.

Among his litany of worldwide bashes, Byford produces one of Palm Springs' signature happenings – Evening Under the Stars – an annual fundraising gala for AIDS Assistance program that welcomes more than 800 guests and VIPs enjoying dinner and top-notch entertainment on a golf course lawn under the warm desert sky. This year's April event was the greenest yet, boasting nearly zero-waste and utilizing many innovative ideas when it comes to producing large-scale events. It's been an uphill battle encouraging his clients, vendors and local government services to keep the environment in mind when planning this event. But well-worth fighting for, Byford adds.



Evening Under the Stars 2008

“The excesses of the corporate events world have always bothered me and I knew deep down that somehow, it all had to change,” he says. “The world in general has to change - we cannot sustain the incredible population growth and this sense of entitlement. Those of us in special events and the entertainment industry with our high public profile can, and should, do something about it - not just one or two of us, but our industry as a whole. We can be leading the way.”

Byway Events & Entertainment has been in business since 1982 and has grown in the past 27 years to include offices in Palm Springs, Florida, the UK and Shanghai. For the past two years, he has been working to ‘green up’ his events after reading that the special events industry was ranked as the second most wasteful industry in the country. In his contracts with local event suppliers and vendors, he consistently chooses options that reduce the environmental impact of his events and the overall carbon footprint.

“There are so many green things that we can do in our every day lives that just make common sense. Simple things that really do not cost any more or take more time. Recycle, reuse & reduce – we all know the mantra, but I produce large events with lots of potential impact, so I’m working to crank it up a notch and convince my clients and vendors that going green is not only the way of the future, but also crucial to our survival.”

It appears he's making serious headway. Classic Party Rentals, the company Byford works with to produce Evening Under the Stars, is inherently 'green.' Renting equipment and supplies has a much lower impact on the environment than buying new. Now, according to Scott Karroll, General Manager of Classic Party Rentals in Palm Springs, his company is taking it one step further based on their 15-year relationship with Byford.



Mary Wilson of The Supremes performs at this year's Evening Under the Stars

"Richard is well-known for producing excellent and exciting events, and now he's inspiring the companies he works with to create celebrations that have a low 'event footprint' yet with the same appeal," says Karroll. "At Classic, we are committed to leading the industry in environmental awareness and sustainable business practices. We're developing and implementing comprehensive recycling, energy and water efficiency, sustainable purchasing, and waste disposal programs."

And Byford isn't just *greenwashing*. His efforts are garnering the attention of an emerging generation of 'green gurus.' Joella Hopkins, President of Simply Mumtaz Events and founder of the California Green Special Events & Meetings Resource Directory, is putting together the inaugural "Green Day on Earth Day," which was held April 22nd at the California Science Center's Big Lab.

"A lot of people say they go green, but Richard has the smarts to get it done," says Hopkins. "There are so few event producers that really are green, so he sets himself

apart simply because he's able to provide 'green' and top-quality service in an eco-friendly way."



The stage is set at Evening Under the Stars 2008

The City of Palm Springs, known for its commitment to sustainability, is also happily jumping on the green events bandwagon. Mayor Steve Pougnet, known as the "Green Mayor" and the architect of the *Palm Springs Path to Sustainability* – a list of green citywide initiatives – is pleased with the direction Byford is heading.

"We're very supportive of Richard's hard work to make 'Evening' more green," says Pougnet. "If you think about it, with almost a thousand people having dinner and enjoying the wonderful entertainment outside, it makes a big impact on the local environment. We're really pleased with how Richard has incorporated so many sustainable aspects. I think that his efforts with so many local vendors and event companies will encourage them to make *all* of their events more sustainable."

In an extraordinarily supportive gesture, the staff liaison to Palm Springs' new Sustainability Commission, Gary Calhoun, volunteered to personally pick up the food waste after the event and haul it down to Cal-Biomass in nearby Thermal. The waste will be mixed with grass clippings, tree trimmings, drywall, and other materials and spend

nearly six months in large windrows, where it will decompose at a temperature of 160 degrees during a process known as *thermaltic conversion*. Eventually, the waste will convert into compost for use in golf courses, tree farms, and country clubs.

“We are striving within the City of Palm Springs to create a culture that promotes, and is supportive of, sustainability and recycling efforts,” says Calhoun, who is also the City’s Recycling Coordinator and a consultant. “So I hope to be able to help Richard in all of his efforts to ‘green up’ future events.”



All of Byford’s events are extravagant yet green.

In his planning to make Evening Under the Stars more eco-friendly, Byford has also included these green components:

- Culligan Water sponsored a portable water filtration system to supply all of the drinking water for the tables, eliminating the need for the more than 4,000 water bottles that were used at last year’s event.
- Palm Springs Disposal Services, one of the City’s major partners, supplied dumpsters and receptacles to recycle all plastic, glass, paper, cardboard.

- Burrtec Waste and Recycling Services supplied solar-powered executive-style bathrooms for event guests.
- Centerpieces for the tables were a decorative table number printed on 50% recycled content / 25% post-consumer waste card stock, rather than flowers and holders that can only be used once.
- The event's large power needs were provided by bio-diesel generators.
- The linens and cloth napkins to be used were made of durable fabric with a longer life, and they will be laundered with eco-friendly chemicals.
- Wherever possible, Energy Star light bulbs and LED units were used for décor, as well as production lighting to reduce the amount of power consumed.

All told, these changes, some simple and some much more complex, made this year's Evening Under the Stars on the O'Donnell Golf Club's green one of the most eco-friendly events in the country with nearly zero-waste. And for Richard Byford, that's a dream come true.

"I'm working to change the general mind set of both our industry and our clients" he offers. "The cost of 'going green' is perceived as a major factor and cost barrier, but in reality, it's the little things and common sense that make a world of difference. You can create compelling, exceptional events, while still increasing the longevity of the planet."

Please post a question or comment on our blog at <http://www.bywayentertainment.com/>
Or email us at richard@bywayentertainment.com. Learn more about "going green" at your next special event.

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