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The American Dental Association hosted its national convention in Las Vegas on October 10-13 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center. The convention drew over 60,000 attendees and is one of the largest held in Las Vegas annually.

Catherine H. Mills, CMP, and director for the Council on ADA Sessions, explained that due to the extraordinary size of their meetings, “green policies are not a driving factor when selecting destinations. However, we have found that many hotels and convention centers are starting [to] implement their own recycling programs for conventions that we gladly take part in.”

Mandalay Bay is owned by the MGM/Mirage group, which is known globally for its commitment to building and maintaining sustainable destinations. Its planning guide explains that the facility’s “internal paperwork is shredded and used as ‘filler’ for shipping items out of the Business Center.” The Convention Center has its own on-site recycling center that recovers and recycles an average of 74 percent of convention waste. The facility also implements many measures to conserve electricity and has installed a natural rubber floor surface in the back-of-the-house, which is harvested using sustainable principles from growing Hevea trees.

The ADA has made good use of technology to offset the environmental impact of its shows.

“The ADA does not print any handouts for its more than 250 continuing education courses offered during the Annual Session,” said Mills. “Attendees can download handouts online before, during or after our Annual Session. This has saved us more than half a million sheets of paper each year since we implemented the program in 2008. We also offer exhibitors the opportunity to upload their brochures and marketing materials to our mobile app, allowing attendees to have more flexible access to exhibitor materials while saving exhibitors the print and paper costs that printed materials incur.

This year, we introduced the new ADA365, the virtual extension of the ADA Annual Session. The site was free and open to the public and had a special members only section. We highlighted the Opening General Session with Dr. Condoleezza Rice, a number of CE courses, nine virtual exhibitors and three video booth walk-throughs, and hot topic panels.”

Like the rest of the medical industry, the oral health community is struggling with making its daily practice more sustainable while grappling with rising health care costs and a weak economy. The Association is encouraging its members to adopt greener operations in order to decrease its carbon footprint while benefiting from accompanying cost savings.

The ADA recently added a new category to its prestigious ADA Golden Apple Award. Beginning in 2010, members may be recognized with The Green Apple-Excellence in Environmentally Sustainable Programs and Education. According to the Association's press release in May 2010, this award includes "programs/activities in waste reduction, energy conservation, water conservation and environmentally sustainable meetings for members in addition to educating members on how to develop a more environmentally sustainable practice."

Another highlight of this year's convention was the ADA's partnership with Colgate to provide underprivileged children with oral health screenings at the show site. This program was conducted in conjunction with the Give Kids A Smile campaign, an annual initiative taking place in February that organizes volunteers across the country to treat children who do not have access to oral health care.

Robert Anderson, local ADA executive director, worked in conjunction with Las Vegas-based company, the DS Group and the David Chow Humanitarian Foundation from California, to organize and transport children for the convention program. Children selected as this year's recipients of services came from the Clark County Public Schools' home school program. Many of these children belong to single-income, self-employed families, in which one parent works while the other stays home to educate their children. As a result, most do not have health insurance, and they were thrilled that their children were eligible for this service. The DS Group and David Chow Foundation will also assist with bringing these and other children for services during February's Give Kids A Smile campaign in Las Vegas.

Mother Nature is undoubtedly smiling on the ADA's efforts to take care our planet and its inhabitants.

Green Tip for November:

Taking care of people is an important part of making our planet a better place to live. Contact

the ADA representative in your area and find out how you and your organization can assist in sponsoring the Give Kids A Smile program in February. A small amount of your time or money may help to ensure that children in your community receive oral health care they desperately need. I was surprised to learn how many children in Las Vegas do not even have their own toothbrushes. Please visit http://www.ada.org/givekidsasmile.aspx to learn more.