

## Going Green: A carbon neutral experience

By Julie Fortier, Ottawa Business Journal Staff  
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With WestJet, Whole Foods, the Olympics and even a Rolling Stones U.K. tour jumping on the bandwagon, carbon neutral business practices seem to be making it into the news more and more often.

The concept is simple: "carbon credits" are purchased to offset the emissions produced by using energy. Carbon offsets can be credits for emission reductions achieved by projects elsewhere, such as wind farms, solar installations, or energy efficiency projects. By purchasing these credits, business owners can apply them to their emissions and reduce the net climate impact.

Jason Kelly, general manager of the Monterey Inn on Prince of Wales Drive has been a leader in sustainable practices for many years and has been a member and contributor of the Green Hotel's Association, the Audubon Green Leaf Eco-Rating Program, and the Rideau Valley Conservation Foundation.

The Monterey Inn was also the first carbon neutral company in Canada. The *OBJ* talked with Mr. Kelly to find out what this means and what the response has been like.

**OBJ:** What exactly is "carbon neutral"?

**KELLY:** The carbon neutral program is one that was introduced to Canada from the TREE Foundation years ago. I took their program to supplement my own existing energy conservation efforts as a final step. Besides all the regular things businesses can do to reduce their energy consumption and reducing their CO2 emission, every year I also plant enough trees to offset the CO2 that has been produced by the energy consumption I have used for the year. I don't buy my energy credits from someone who is under using them, I pay for trees to be planted. We actually take initiative upon ourselves to create the credits ourselves.

The first few years we did it we planted over 5,000 trees. That was in the Almonte area and here in Ottawa with the help of the TREE Canada Foundation and the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority.

**OBJ:** What is included in the sum total of emissions you calculate?

**KELLY:** I am offsetting all the energy consumption, so hydro and gas, all of our utility consumption. I offset all of the commuting emissions, so we do surveys every six months to figure out if employees are taking the bus or taking their own cars to and from work. We also have a company vehicle and it is carbon neutral because we look at how much gas we consume in a year.

**OBJ:** Why did you decide to do this?

**KELLY:** For a few reasons. Here at the Monterey, we are situated on five acres on the Rideau River and it was a natural fit to what the Rideau River gives us in terms of business. This is our way of giving something back to the natural environment that gives so much to us.

It's also a win-win for business. As you see in the media these days, people are always looking for green solutions and alternatives and we're proud to be a part of that.

But these kinds of initiatives also go a long way to reducing energy consumption and expenses. For example, we went through here three years ago and made sure that we replaced all of our incandescent lights to compact fluorescent. I went from 75 watt bulbs to 13 watt. You're seeing businesses everywhere do this now. Whenever we buy new equipment we buy more energy efficient equipment.

There are so many initiatives and one of the strongest ones in the hospitality industry that is being implemented by the Hotel Association of Canada is called the Green Key Program. We are one of the two hotels in the country that are rated at the five key level. The Green Key program lets you audit your operations from energy conservation to waste reduction. So we were able to find a company in Ottawa that took all our kitchen waste. The Green Key Program gives you a checklist to look at all these things.

**OBJ:** What is the response like from employees and customers?

**KELLY:** We have a lot of programs to make sure that employees are involved in the programs. We are a part of the City of Ottawa's Stream Watch program to help bring awareness to the staff and bring awareness to the ecosystem since Ottawa is at the junction of three rivers. So we have the staff monitoring progress for that and completing surveys. We have information that is given to the staff telling them what they could be doing in their own lives. So the staff (reaction) has been very positive. It's always about getting over that curve. It's either tedious or outside of their norm, but once they get over that, then they carry it with them.



Jason Kelly, GM of the Monterey Inn and Resort. (Darren Brown, OBJ)

From a customers' point of view, the more we can be doing on an environmental effort with very little impact on their experience in their room, the better. You can come to a room at the Monterey or any other hotel and there's not going to be much of a difference in service. You're still going to get all the same services, but everything from the chemicals you're using in the laundry and cleaning the rooms, to how we're handling our energy consumption, is done with an environmental policy in mind.

OBJ: Do you see going carbon neutral as a trend that is going to get more popular?

KELLY: As people become more and more aware, I think there is going to be more of a demand for the carbon neutral program. Hotels and the hospitality sector is one of the more energy-consuming and waste-producing businesses, most people don't clean their towels every day, for example. I think this is becoming more of a mandatory aspect to how they conduct business with the cost of energy affecting the hotel's bottom line. But I also think it is a more responsible direction for the hospitality industry to be moving towards in terms of reducing their impact. The carbon neutral program is a great add-on to any energy reducing programs to show that you're going that extra mile.

## THE EXPERTS SAY

When companies want to go carbon neutral, most will fill out a basic questionnaire to tell us how much energy they use and we estimate how much carbon they use in a year, then we calculate how many trees they need to plant. So we look at how much hydro they use to run their business. If they have a fleet of vehicles that are dependent on their business, how many kilometres they go. Then we make further calculations to determine how many trees they need to plant to offset that because a tree is 50 per cent carbon. So you can plant trees to absorb carbon that you produce.

We aren't advocating go ahead and pollute and the plant some trees, we really want to advocate creating less emissions by doing things like minimizing travel, changing lights and insulating your building. You go as far as you can to save energy and then you can go the extra mile to offset what's left over through planting trees.

We've been around since 1992, but lately, since December, our business is going through the roof in terms of offsets. All the polling is showing that people are concerned with the environment. Any company that wants to have an idea of what they produce, we have a carbon calculator on our website and it calculates how many trees you need to plant to offset the emissions. We can arrange tree planting anywhere in Canada.

**Michael Rosen**, *president of TREE Canada*

Carbon zero helps Canadians neutralize their carbon gas emissions through a variety of projects. For businesses, we provide the opportunity to neutralize their emissions by hooking them up with renewable energy providers and other projects. They can either do the calculations themselves or we can do it for them for a fee.

Say, for example, a company produces 10 tonnes of emissions per year, when they want to neutralize their gas emissions, they fund renewable energy through us. When you choose to offset your emissions by renewable energy development, your money will be used to help develop wind energy in Alberta at a cost of \$22 per tonne of emission for companies.

We also have a project to help retrofit community housing at \$36.50 per tonne. The project helps low-income families in Southern Ontario by replacing energy-wasting incandescent with energy compact fluorescent bulbs.

The renewable energy providers and project co-ordinators give us a price per tonne because they have done the verified calculations. We help market their ambitions to and set up businesses with those renewable energy providers.

We have helped a touring company and several small businesses so far. But the possibilities are endless. If you use electricity or travel for business, you can neutralize your emissions. We also calculate how much emission you produce if your business has a fleet of vehicles. Even if you want to make your product shipments carbon neutral, we can calculate that into the total.

**Howie Chong**, *spokesperson for Carbon Zero*

