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Classic Green Practices on Display at Evening Under the Stars

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 will be 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.

"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 everyday 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."

"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."

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

- Culligan Water is sponsoring 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, is supplying dumpsters and receptacles to recycle all plastic, glass, paper, cardboard.
- Burrtec Waste and Recycling Services is supplying solar-powered executive-style bathrooms for event guests.
- Centerpieces for the tables will be 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 will be provided by bio-diesel generators.
- The linens and cloth napkins to be used are 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 will be 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, will make 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."