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Power system's savings exceed expectations

HOSPITALITY: Business owners address climate-change issues

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WHISTLER — The Marriott Residence Inn is soaking up the savings after introducing a state-of-the-art hybrid power system.

Since introducing the patent-pending system by Sempa Power Systems of West Vancouver, the Whistler strata hotel has saved \$110,000 in energy costs over its 2002-03 baseline. Much of the savings is coming from lower energy costs to run its outdoor pools and hot tubs.

"It is nice to see that this exceeded our expectations," said Ian Lowe, general manager of the Marriott, who had the system installed last year.

"The whole strata council, which had gone through this vision-making with myself, were very, very pleased with it both from an environmental perspective as well as financial."

Indeed, in the first eight months of the project, every one of the 186 owners of units also met and exceeded Canada's now defunct One-Tonne Challenge, which pledged in 2002 to cut annual greenhouse-gas emissions by 240 million tonnes.

The system significantly reduces heating costs and greenhouse-gas emissions by switching energy types to use the lowest-cost fuel at any time of the day or night.

In the case of the Marriott, explained Lowe, a propane boiler was added to the system, which powers the outdoor pool area.

That way, the computerized system could switch between electricity and propane at any time, depending on which fuel was cheaper.

Sempa also put all the strata units on one common electricity meter and set the heat-tracer system to come on only when the temperature falls below a certain temperature.

"Our [heat-tracer system] was an on-off system previ-

ously," said Lowe. "You turned it on in October and off in April.

"This is the [system] that is saving the most for the environment because . . . this winter there were only about 45 days where it had to be turned on, compared to the past where it would be on for about 210 days."

The Marriott is not the only hotel to take advantage of the hybrid system, said Randall Jang, one the founders of SPS.

The company also works with Intrawest, the Four Seasons, Glacier Creek Lodge, the Legends and others. SPS is also working with businesses in Vancouver and elsewhere.

"We came up with this crazy idea that what we could do was make building more responsive to energy cost in the marketplace and, in doing that, it would create these great opportunities to cut greenhouse gases," said Jang by way of explaining why SPS was founded by a group of engineers and building professionals who have more than 100 years of experience collectively.

Jang said business owners and others want to do their part to address climate-change issues.

"But it is very difficult for [people] and they ring their hands and say, 'What can we be doing?'" said Jang, adding that in most cases businesses achieve more than 20 per cent in savings.

"Everyone has this perception that it costs a lot of money, that you are only able to do this with huge governments subsidies, but that is not the case.

"People want to do the right thing," he said.

"You just have to give them the tools and that is what is very satisfying and rewarding about this."

Jang and Lowe believe tourists are looking for environmentally responsible accommodation, too, and will use that criterion when booking.

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■ Ian Lowe, general manager of Whistler's Marriott Residence Inn, stands in the hotel's spa area, where the biggest money savings from the Sempa hybrid-power system have been realized.

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