

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

NEW ORLEANS GETS ITS FIRST SMOKE-FREE HOTEL

By Dan Schlossberg
ConsumerAffairs.com

Hanging up a "No Smoking" sign in a New Orleans hotel was once considered heresy. But not in 2006 - at least for the owner of several boutique properties.

Even as the city staggers to its feet in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Sean Cummings has declared his Big Easy properties smoke-free. International House, Loft 523, and the Lengsfeld Loft project are open to the public - but not to anyone who wants to smoke indoors.

"New Orleans is no longer the city that care forgot," says Cummings. "In fact, her citizens have shown now more than ever how much they do care. Our guests want a good experience. Staying with us is a lifestyle purchase. So smoking is out -- there's not one good thing about it."

Although New Orleans has a reputation as a party city with a penchant for ignoring trends popular in other places, Cummings suggested his decision is consistent with a city committed to a more vital, vibrant future.

"We care about our neighbors, employees, and guests and want a long, fun life with them," he said. "How can we have joie de vivre without the vivre?"

Both the city and the state of Louisiana have been slow to pass anti-smoking legislation though more than 12 states have banned virtually all smoking in public places.

"Here in New Orleans, we have a passion for world-class excellence," Cummings said. "It's in our music, our food, our architecture, our culture, and on our riverfront. Going smoke-free is a big step we're taking to boost the length and quality of life in America's most soulful city, and one of its most historic."

He said statistics show smoking kills 6,400 Louisiana residents per year, while another 1,200 people die from exposure to second-hand smoke that they breathe. Together, that amounts to 20 deaths per day, Cummings concluded.

"We've had enough death and destruction recently," he said. "Every day, we in this business in this city strive to create beautiful buildings with a signature sense of this great place. Smoking contributes nothing and has no place in our post-storm properties."

The 119-room International House, located two blocks from the French Quarter, was the first boutique hotel in New Orleans, while Loft 523, a former carriage and dry-goods warehouse, was the city's first loft hotel. Lengsfeld Loft project is one of several SoHo-style residential lofts also owned by Cummings and converted to smoke-free status for 2006.

The owner feels so strongly about his decision that he's imposed a \$200 surcharge if evidence of smoking is detected in a guest's room.

His campaign is called "You're beautiful. We care. Please don't."

For further information, contact International House, 221 Camp St., New Orleans, LA 70130 (Tel. 504-553-9550, Fax 504-553-9560, www.ihhotel.com), www.loft523.com, or www.lengsfeldlofts.com.