

# Reducing the Waste Line

By Joanna DeChellis | January 5th, 2016 – Chef to Chef January 2016 Edition

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The greens on the golf course at Town & Country Club (T&CC) in Saint Paul, Minn. are some of the fastest in the state. And throughout the property, the club's green dining operation is one of the most impressive in the nation.

In fact, T&CC is the only country club to date that has earned a 3-Star Certified Green Restaurant designation from the Green Restaurant Association (GRA).

For T&CC, being green comes down to the small things, like light bulbs and water usage. General Manager/COO Vincent Tracy, CCM, CCE, knows this more than most. He's been the primary driver behind the club's push to be more environmentally responsible.

(In March, Tracy and T&CC's Executive Chef, John Kain, will share insights into how they earned the prestigious certification, and the benefits it has provided for their club, through their presentation—"Making Club Restaurants Green"—at *C&RB's* eighth annual Chef to Chef Conference.

## **C2C: Why did T&CC pursue the Green Restaurant Certification?**

**VT:** When I arrived in 2004, the club had a progressive recycling program for food waste, glass and cardboard. The golf course was also a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. We knew we could do more, though. It was a matter of figuring out where to start.

## **C2C: What was the first step?**

**VT:** At that time, there weren't many associations that helped businesses go green. Prices to do so were really high, too. So we took a closer look at the operation and decided removing all Styrofoam products was a good place to start.

## **C2C: Did you get any pushback from the members?**

**VT:** The only product the members were unhappy about was the drink cups on the golf course. But we searched and searched and finally found a biodegradable cup better than Styrofoam. And now they're happy.

## **C2C: What happened next?**

**VT:** One of the local papers actually wrote an article shaming us for not being green, even though we were

doing many green things already. We decided we needed to get the word out about what we were doing. That led us to the Green Restaurant Association.

**C2C: Why the GRA?**

**VT:** They are the most all-encompassing and the most thorough. They reward restaurants with points in seven environmental categories: energy, water, waste, disposables, chemical and pollution reduction, sustainable food and sustainable building materials. To be certified, a restaurant must accumulate a total of 100 points, meet a minimum of 10 points in six of the seven categories, have a full-scale recycling program, be free of polystyrene foam and implement a yearly education program.

**C2C: Did it take long to get certified?**

**VT:** Yes. It's not something you can fill out in a couple of hours and send in. You have to show a history with invoices, tracking where you've purchased products from and how long you've been using them. There are site visits and lots of hand-holding. It's a big undertaking.

**C2C: How did the staff respond once you told them you planned to earn the certification?**

**VT:** They were overwhelmed, but over the course of one year, as we moved through the process, they jumped on board.

**C2C: What has been Chef Kain's role in all of this?**

**VT:** Without him, it wouldn't be possible. He's genuinely excited about using local resources and has helped our purchasing agent research greenware and to-go containers (see photo, above). He highlights everything we grow in our garden, as well as the honey we collect from our bees (see "[Hosting Hives](#)," *C&RB's* Chef to Chef, July 2015).

**C2C: What is your relationship like with Chef Kain?**

**VT:** We have a similar drive and passion. And we both understand the importance of food and a well-run culinary operation. Neither of us wants to stay static, so we continue to grow our relationship and move the club forward.

**C2C: Have prices for green products come down much since those first few years?**

**VT:** They have. Plus, we have a new engineer on board who has embraced the initiative. He was the force behind helping us reach our third star for the clubhouse in February 2015.

**C2C: Overall, how has being green impacted your budget?**

**VT:** I would say it has probably increased our costs by \$6,000 annually. We offset the cost of products by the savings in energy and water. Plus, we're eligible for local rebates, too.

**C2C: How does being green affect day-to-day operations?**

**VT:** It affects us in small ways as we're always looking to be more green. For example, we just changed the sprayer heads on our sinks to be more efficient, and employees now drink from washable cups. All of our

throwaway silverware is made from potatoes. We have plans to put up solar panels and we budgeted to buy a machine that turns fryer oil into diesel fuel. We're going to expand our gardens as well.

**C2C: Going green is a big trend. What other culinary trends have affected F&B at T&CC?**

**VT:** It's funny you ask that. I just saw the National Restaurant Association's "What's Hot in 2016," which features a forecast of the top 20 food trends for 2016. I can't think of a time when T&CC wasn't doing everything on that list.

**C2C: How has the industry's focus on F&B evolved over the years, and why are we better or worse for it?**

**VT:** F&B has grown substantially, and more clubs are food-focused. But still too many treat F&B like an amenity and accept that it's okay to lose money on dining. It should be treated as a profit center—like a real restaurant. We're in the process of making that switch. We shrunk down our menus and are focusing more on daily and weekly specials.

**C2C: Do you think you'll be as profitable as a "real restaurant?"**

**VT:** We'll see.

**C2C: What value do you see in continuing education programs—like the upcoming Chef to Chef Conference?**

**VT:** Continuing education has become the backbone to our program. Very few individuals will self-educate, so it's our job as general managers to give our staff the tools to grow themselves and, in turn, our clubs.

**C2C: What kind of people thrive on T&CC's F&B team?**

**VT:** People with a good attitude. Self-starters. Imaginative and creative people who aren't afraid of hard work. People who pay attention to details and never cut corners. People like Chef Kain, who is passionate, smart, thoughtful and detail-oriented.