



Behind the Scenes Green: Mansion House on Martha's Vineyard

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All eyes are on Martha's Vineyard as President Obama and his family (with First Dog Bo in tow) returns for their second annual vacation to the island. But in one landmark inn, currently hosting the White House press corps, there are things taking place below the surface that visitors can't even see.

In the first of her series spotlighting hotels with behind-the-scenes green initiatives, Leslie Garrett, the Virtuous Traveler, reports on an innovative concept that turns a wasteful problem into an eco-solution.

For years, the leaky basement at Mansion House was proprietor Susan Goldstein's annoying little secret.

Even following a total rebuild, after fire destroyed the Martha's Vineyard landmark in 2001, a daily 16,000 gallons of water had to be sump-pumped, thanks to a basement that was too deep into the groundwater.

But Goldstein, who owns Mansion House together with her husband Sherman, recently decided to turn her dirty secret into a green one: by installing a geothermal system that relies on the groundwater to essentially store solar energy. Mansion House simply draws on the power as needed. A second phase to the project will ensure that the heat energy will be further used for



the hotel's pool and hot water needs.

It's quite ingenious—taking a problem and turning it into a solution—and Goldstein credits the hotel plant engineer Jay McMann with bringing the notion of geothermal to her attention.

Vineyard-based engineer Brian Nelson of Nelson Mechanical Design was hired to create the system. It's deceptively simple, he insists, wondering aloud why more establishments don't adopt it.

Goldstein insists she barely understands the technology, but is excited about adopting an energy source that better serves her community and the planet. She's delighted that Mansion House serves as something of a prototype—a green success story of making clean energy technology work.

To guests of Mansion House, which have included Edward Kennedy and, for the Obama's current visit, the White House press corps, nothing has changed. They never knew about the leaky basement and likely won't know a thing about the geothermal installation.



And that's just fine with Goldstein. She wants her guests to be comfortable, noting that people come for vacation and shouldn't have to give up comforts like air conditioning.

"No one's willing to change their habits. We have to change our methods of production," she says.

The true beauty, she believes, is that it's a technology that's working right under everyone's noses—or in this case, feet—that is essentially invisible. It's a valid point, given the conflicting view about the Cape Wind Farm proposal at nearby Nantucket Sound.

"No one knows about this," she says. "We're not taking anyone's water, obstructing anyone's view. It's just quietly happening in our damp basement."

By Leslie Garrett for PeterGreenberg.com. Leslie is an award-winning journalist and author of The Virtuous Consumer: Your Essential Shopping Guide for a Better, Kinder, Healthier World. Visit her on the Web at www.virtuousconsumer.com.