



# Housekeeping

by William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE

## Hotels nationally donate gently used linens to homeless shelters

Another great article from *The Rooms Chronicle*® the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! \*\*\*Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.\*\*\* College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com

Notice: The ideas, opinions, recommendations, and interpretations presented herein are those of the author(s). The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University/The Rooms Chronicle® assume no responsibility for the validity of claims in items reported.

It's that time of the year again – the season for giving. Instead of making their own lists of what they'd like to receive this holiday, some people are putting a little more thought into ways they can brighten the holiday season for those in need. Hoteliers are no exception, and as the everyday providers of a “home-away-from-home,” they are in a unique position to help those without a place to call home.

Fortunately, corporations like Procter & Gamble Professional® have developed a way to leverage hotels' unfailing commitment to the community to make a real difference in the lives of others. Mission S.O.F.T. (“Start Out Fresh Today”) has made the act of giving a year-round tradition that can only continue with the constant support of hotels across the nation.

### The launch of a unique idea

Since its inception three years ago, Mission S.O.F.T. has operated within America's hotel industry to bring a touch of home comforts to homeless families and individuals across the nation. Area hotels come together and donate gently used linens, including towels, sheets, blankets, pillows, pillowcases and comforters. Hotels launder the linens in trusted P&G Professional brands, Tide® Downy® and Clorox®, and then donate them to homeless shelters.

“Sleeping in a hotel room is a luxury so many of us take for granted,” said Hilary Heffernan, assistant brand manager for P&G Professional. “Mission S.O.F.T. is such a unique program because it gives those without a home the opportunity to enjoy one of life's simple pleasures – clean, soft towels and sheets.”

Now, more than ever, homeless shelters need the support of philanthropic programs like Mission S.O.F.T. The floundering economy has left Americans of all backgrounds in unfortunate circumstances, sometimes depriving them of their most crucial possession – their home.

### The answer to a growing need

According to a recent published study conducted by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, approximately 3.5 million people are likely to experience homelessness in a given year. Families with children are one of the fastest growing segments of this population, representing approximately 23 percent of the entire homeless community. For that reason, P&G Professional has chosen to bring Mission S.O.F.T. to homeless shelters serving women and children, in particular.

“Mission S.O.F.T. is an extension of P&G's global Live, Learn, and Thrive philanthropy,” said Debbie Marquardt, marketing director for P&G Professional.

Pictured below: Volunteers at the Phoenix Rescue Mission unload a full truck bed of donated linens at the Mainstay Suites, a local hotel agreeing to return the linens fresh and clean to the shelter.



“Our company culture encourages us to look for opportunities to extend a home-like feeling to families in crisis, where comfort can bring healing, and that is exactly what Mission S.O.F.T. does. Simply put, it allows people to ‘Start Out Fresh Today.’”

The results of the program speak dividends for the generosity of hoteliers nationwide. In three years, P&G Professional has partnered with more than 160 lodging properties in 35 different cities throughout the United States. Altogether, Mission S.O.F.T. has generated more than 38,000 linen donations, which have been shared with almost half a million Americans taking refuge in shelters.

Residents at the Louisville Coalition for the Homeless recently experienced an outpour of donations when Mission S.O.F.T. visited Louisville at the beginning of 2008. Altogether, hotels generously supplied the organization with approximately 1,800 linens, which were distributed among the coalition’s 37 partner agencies.

“A program like Mission S.O.F.T. supports the ‘pay it forward’ philosophy,” said Becki Winchel, community outreach coordinator at the Louisville Coalition for the Homeless. “It teaches people in the community how small acts of kindness can truly make a difference for folks who need it most.”

Although homeless shelters provide a safe haven from the bleak alternative of life on the streets, Winchel believes there is a general misconception that paints their services as a simple handout – and not a hand-up. On the contrary, Winchel is proud of the coalition’s position as both an emergency shelter and a transitional facility. Donations provided by Mission S.O.F.T. helps give their residents a comfortable place to sleep. In some cases, it also provides an extra boost as they start over and transition into their own homes.

“One important objective of our agency is to provide temporary relief and, step-by-step, help people move themselves out of homelessness and become self-sufficient. Our clients share that goal as well,” Winchel said. “Whether they know it or not, hotels contributing to Mission S.O.F.T. are doing a great thing by saving our residents one more expense in setting up house when they are on their own again.”

Pictured below: One staff member at the Millennium Hotel in Cincinnati breaks from his normal routine and helps prepare linens for people other than the hotel’s day-to-day guests.



Pictured below: The Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida received more than 1,400 fresh, clean linens from Orlando hotels participating in Mission S.O.F.T.



#### **The collaboration of hotels nationwide**

Hoteliers have been truly motivated by Mission S.O.F.T.’s cause and, in many cases, have gone above and beyond the program’s expectations. While linens have undoubtedly dominated the flood of donations, hotels have put their own stamp on Mission S.O.F.T. by donating other home start-up necessities like coffee makers, dinnerware, glassware, personal hygiene products and other houseware items.

For many hotels participating in Mission S.O.F.T., the opportunity could not have surfaced at a better time. The Embassy Suites Westshore in Tampa, FL, for example, was undergoing a complete 225-room renovation when its general manager received a call from P&G Professional. The hotel donated more than 400 comforters to the cause.

Even without linen donations, hotels still find a way to contribute to Mission S.O.F.T. Following in the footsteps of several other hoteliers, Teddy Roque, general manager of the Hilton Garden Inn Tampa, volunteered his staff’s time and energy to launder the donated linens. P&G Professional donated Tide, Downy and Clorox to help return the linens fresh, soft and clean to the residents at Metropolitan Ministries.

“Mission S.O.F.T. came at a perfect time for our hotel. We had been thinking of ways we could become more involved in the community and along came Mission S.O.F.T.,” said Roque, whose staff laundered hundreds of linens. “Our core philosophy in the hospitality industry is mirroring Conrad Hilton’s vision of being hospitable. We are simply going back to the basics and doing what we can to help people rebuild their lives. We are so proud to be a part of Mission S.O.F.T. and P&G Professional’s act of kindness.”

The overwhelming response of hoteliers has proven the need for a national program like Mission S.O.F.T. And with the green movement more prevalent than ever in the hospitality industry, perhaps Mission S.O.F.T. can help solve another daunting challenge facing hoteliers – environmental responsibility. Mission S.O.F.T. helps ensure aging linens will not end up in the trash.

This begs the question, “What are you doing with your used linens?” ✧

*(To learn more about Mission S.O.F.T. and how your hotel can get involved in the cause to help fight homelessness, please visit [www.pgpro.com](http://www.pgpro.com) and click on the Mission S.O.F.T. link. For even more information, please contact Hilary Heffernan at 513-983-1575.)*