

Luxury seminar becomes dual learning experience:

The seminar audience was comprised of 75 luxury marketers, the subject was Canadian fur, the panelists knew their stuff but they still learned a thing or two from their listeners.

During the hour-long session, sponsored in New York's fur district by the Luxury Marketing Council, one of the panelists, Keith Kaplan, executive director of the Fur Information Council of America (FICA), posed a question to the audience and called for a show of hands.

"Do any of you have a problem buying or marketing fur because of perceived animal cruelty?"

About a third of the audience raised their hands.

One audience member, an attractively dressed young lady, said that she would like to have some way of knowing that if she bought a fur garment she wasn't supporting a cruel and uncaring industry that brutalized animals.

Kaplan had already talked about the untruths dished up endlessly by animal rights organizations, but the young woman's question gave him an opportunity to tell the audience something they didn't know.

"To preach continuously that fur farmers mistreat their charges shows a lack of good thinking and commonsense," he said. "If you have any animals or know people who do, you must be aware that when they are not cared for, the first sign of poor health will be the condition of their coats. The mink and fox raised by fur farmers live twice as long or even longer than their counterparts in the wild and are cared for to the highest standards of health and nutrition as evidenced by the lustrous quality of their coats."

He went on to explain the new OA (Origin Assured) campaign launched by the International Fur Trade Federation (IFTF) that polices fur farms around the world and issues a hang tag for finished garments that certifies the highest standards of animal husbandry applied in the raising of the fur.

The OA program was introduced to the fur industry in May by Kaplan and officers of the IFTF at the North American Fur & Fashion Expo, Montreal, (NAFFEM). Kaplan recapped for his New York audience the standards of animal care that have to be met and the steps taken by the IFTF to make sure that they are.

Animals trapped in the wild for their fur and meat are also treated with the utmost respect said another panelist, Mark Downey, a licensed trapper since he

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was 16. Since 2001 he has been chief executive officer of Fur Harvesters Auction, a cooperative headquartered in North Bay, Ontario, three hours north of Toronto, and half owned by Canada's indigenous people, who have depended on trapping for millennia.

"The nature of the traps we use were the subject of intensive international study to arrive at humane standards," Downey said. "Those standards were approved by European nations, and trapping in Canada is policed and supervised by various government agencies from Ottawa on down. Trappers must complete a comprehensive course to get a license, and if they fail to adhere to the standards, they will quickly lose their trap lines."

Downey said that by the best estimates there are more fur-bearing animals in the wild in Canada today than when the first Europeans arrived, and no endangered or threatened species are ever harvested.

He also pointed out that where laws are passed based on emotion and not reality, problems arise, such as the cancellation of annual bear hunts in some areas, resulting in a population explosion that sees the animals at a disadvantage as their habitat can no longer support them and they overrun developed areas.

The third panelist, Gwen Nacos, president of Montreal-based Natural Furs International, in whose New York showroom the seminar took place, said that the facts about good fur husbandry are very important to her and her employees.

"Trunk shows are one of our principal marketing techniques," she explained, "and we conduct several a year on the premises of our principal retail customers, such as Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue. The question of animal cruelty is often raised by consumers who have been exposed to the campaigns of the animal rights organizations, and we appreciate the opportunities to get the facts on record.

"We make the point that abusing animals would be counter productive to the business of producing top quality furs, and stress that the standards of the fur industry are as high or higher than any agricultural category that involves livestock. We stay abreast of that and conduct business conclaves so that retail store employees fully understand not only the new collections, but how carefully the animals are cared for, so that they can answer questions posed by their customers." wealth, and the issue get the best play with the media".

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