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Dulles, VA - The 5th Annual NGCOA Mid-Atlantic Innovation Awards were presented at the Association's annual meeting at 1757 Golf Club on October 18th.



Mike Augustin (L) of Belle Haven CC receives the Sustainability Award from Matt Miller

Mid-Atlantic Sustainability Leader Award



The NGCOA Mid-Atlantic's newest award is the *Sustainability Award*, recognizing the ability to incorporate sustainability and environmental stewardship into operating practices. Belle Haven Country Club in Alexandria, VA is the 2017 honoree, in recognition of their environmental stewardship associated with superior maintenance practices alongside the Potomac River, and their unique on-site farming for the Club's kitchen. Golf Course Superintendent Mike Augustin accepted the award.

When your club sits in a flood plain on the Potomac River, with an adjacent highway carrying thousands of eyeballs daily, that's the definition of "pressure" for a Golf Course Superintendent. Make one wrong move, and environmental watchdogs are on you right away. But Belle Haven's Mike Augustin counters, "From day one, we had a mindset to be environmentally sensitive. You simply **MUST** do the right thing."

Marrying a commitment to environmental stewardship with the demand for superior golf course conditioning is not a task for the faint of heart. Programs such as buffering ponds, tree removal and tree addition all contribute to ensure aesthetics, playability and responsible golf course management.

"Our goal is for water to leave our property cleaner than it entered," notes Augustin. He has a Storm Water Management Plan to capture runoff in buffers before entering the flood plain of the Potomac. Combine that with the natural filtering characteristics of turfgrass which absorbs nutrients, and you can achieve this goal. And of course inputs are expensive, so applications are set conservatively.

In 2002, Belle Haven undertook a major golf course renovation. This included pond improvements which incorporated "Best Management Practices" standards. All water drains into the ponds first, where they can treat and allow sediment to settle and then the nutrients to be absorbed. Pond aerators keep fish healthy and deter surface algae. Quarterly water samples are a key tool in maintaining pond health. In fact, the Club agreed to keep extensive records as part of their water permit.

The Club added a new pond at the clubhouse entrance off Fort Hunt Road as another environmental area. The Club's Horticulturist created floating wetlands, featuring irises and other wetland plants with roots extending into the pond's base. These floating wetlands help remove nutrients from the water which in turn helps mitigate unwanted nutrient release into nearby streams.

As a Golf Course with many water features and adjacent to the Potomac River, Belle Haven was prone to problems with Canadian geese. The Club's commitment to protecting wildlife often clashed with maintenance standards. Their humane solution was a combination of Border collies and a laser light

system that does not harm geese.

The Club is actually a haven for wildlife. American Bald eagles built a large nest on the 16th hole adjacent to the Potomac. Recently the nest was taken over by ospreys, who hatched chicks the past two years. On any given day, you might see blue herons, eastern bluebirds, mallards, wood ducks, Asian ducks, red tail hawks, turkeys, deer, red fox, coyotes and more. Fish species include bass, bluegill, eels, carp and sunfish. Members may fish "catch and release" during non-golf times.

Augustin noted that the club has a special tree masterplan. During the course renovation, the Course Architect collaborated with an Arborist. Some species you will see at Belle Haven include willow oak, bald cypress, loblolly pine, tulip poplar, black gum, eastern red cedar, holly, diadora cedars and various fruit trees.

Staff training at Belle Haven is constant. Attention to detail is required to maintain high standards in environmental stewardship. It requires constant monitoring to make sure everyone is aware of their surroundings. Practices such as disposal of gas and oil are always done in the proper manner.

With Belle Haven's location on the Potomac River, pumping water sometimes becomes necessary, and they have to ensure it is clean water. "No one wants to be on the wrong side of their neighbors and community," said Augustin. "Our members *expect* our staff to be good stewards." Pesticides are not applied when there is a risk of runoff.

One truly unique feature of sustainability is the set of six beehives on the property. A local company is hired to tend to the hives, which produce honey used by the Club Chef and offered for sale in the Golf Pro Shop. They started with just one hive five years ago, and the program grew. Augustin described the supplemental feeding of bees with a simple syrup concoction. He notes the Club's commitment to pollinator protection.

The Club also has vegetable and herb gardens under Augustin's responsibility. The herb garden is near the clubhouse, so the Chef can easily access it. Their produce includes squash, zucchini, eggplant, okra, hot peppers, green peppers, and in the fall, beets, radishes, leafy lettuce and acorn squash. Something new are blackberry and raspberry bushes. The Chef loves offering an organic menu. And just like a home garden, it's a lot of work keeping the weeds out.

Augustin was excited to see Belle Haven honored with this award. "It's great to get recognized for doing the right thing," remarked Augustin. "It shows peers that small things can create win-win situations, with benefits to the environment, the Club and the community."

Mike Augustin is a 20-year veteran at Belle Haven CC. He has also worked at Bethesda CC and he got his start at Indian Springs CC. His degree is in Turf Urban Agronomy from the University of Maryland.

NGCOA Mid-Atlantic Award Sponsor



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About NGCOA Mid-Atlantic

NGCOA Mid-Atlantic is a chapter of the National Golf Course Owners Association.

Our goals and objectives are to:

- Consider the challenges of operations and management of golf course owners and operators throughout the Mid-Atlantic.
- Encourage the growth and preserve the traditions of the game of golf in the Mid-Atlantic.
- Promote activities designed to increase the efficiency of golf course operations.
- Cooperate with allied golf associations who support the goals of the Association.
- Advance cooperation and the exchange of ideas among Association members.