

BY KATIE MORRIS

## Combining natural and purchased resources

Virginia Beach golf course coordinator depends on Mother Nature and a distributor to maintain ponds

Pond maintenance plays an important role in the overall look and feel of a golf course, but being in charge of three courses and keeping up with maintaining them can be challenging. Kevin Bennington, golf course coordinator for the city of Virginia Beach relies mainly on natural resources to maintain the health and beauty of the ponds on the city's courses.

Bennington oversees the budgets, staffs and equipment maintenance for three 18-hole municipal golf courses: Red Wing Lake, Kempsville Greens and Bow Creek. Previously, he was the golf course superintendent at Red Wing. In July, he was promoted to his current position.

Bennington is responsible for maintaining multiple ponds on each course. The ponds occupy 44 acres: two at Bow Creek, 12 at Kempsville and 30 at Red Wing. The number of ponds on the courses total 24: two at Bow Creek, eight at Kempsville and 14 at Red Wing. The ponds at Red Wing range in size from 8,000 square feet to 15 acres.

Even with this many ponds to maintain, Bennington relies mainly on nature to help keep them looking aesthetically pleasing and healthy.

"We leave a lot of it to nature," he says. "We don't use aerators

because we get decent current flow from the wind."

The three courses are located near larger bodies of water including the Atlantic Ocean and Back Bay. The wind and ocean breezes drive the ponds' tides, which circulate the oxygen in the water, Bennington says. The natural system seems to work because he says he hasn't had a problem with algae and other unwanted vegetation.

The courses are irrigated with fresh water from storm runoff or supplemental wells. Red Wing has been redesigned to collect everything on site for reuse as part of a more environmentally friendly



Kevin Bennington relies mainly on Mother Nature to maintain the 14 ponds at Red Wing Lake Golf Course. He doesn't use aerators because of current flow from the wind. The course is near the Atlantic Ocean. Photo: city of Virginia Beach



approach to irrigation.

Even with nature's help, Bennington still is required to take some preventive measures throughout the year to make sure the ponds remain healthy. They're inspected daily for any abnormalities, water tests are conducted once a year, and a flail mower is used along the banks of each pond semiannually.

"We purchase flail mowers with a 20-foot extension to get down off the side of the banks," he says. "We spend two hours a month during the summer doing this kind of maintenance."

But nature can't help Bennington with chemical applications. There's a stagnant pond at Bow Creek that requires chemical treatments. For this application, Bennington turns to Turf & Garden to provide him with Aquashade, a dye containing copper sulfate that prevents algae growth. He says a gallon of Aquashade or a case of dry packs can last between two to three years.

Each course has about a \$500,000 annual maintenance budget of which \$110,000 is spent on chemicals and fertilizers. Only \$300 of the chemical spending is for treating the pond at Bow Creek.

The city of Virginia Beach has a contract with Turf & Garden and has been purchasing its aquatic products and other chemicals and

fertilizers from the distributor for more than 10 years.

"Who does the purchasing depends on the cost," Bennington says. "We can handle as much as \$5,000, but anything higher has to go through the city's purchasing department."

With noncontract vendors, Bennington writes specifications and has to generate at least three quotes from companies who meet them. From there, he's required to go with the lowest bidder or justify the difference.

The city's and Bennington's loyalty to Turf & Garden has much to do with the location of the company. Bennington's sales representative is located in a neighboring city and can get him anything he needs within two hours, which has been helpful when Bennington needs a product or part immediately.

Bennington likes the service he receives from Turf & Garden because the company's prices are fair, it's easy to work with and its representative is always available. Turf & Garden's biggest selling point for Bennington is its warehousing option.

"Not only do I enjoy its pricing and location, but it also warehouses all of our chemicals so I don't have to maintain inventory on site," he says. **GCI**

To help maintain stagnant ponds, Bennington applies a dye containing copper sulfate to help prevent algae growth. A gallon of the product, Aquashade, can last as long as three years. Photo: Allen Rockwell

