

Off The Fringe

Water Friendly

MARYLAND COURSE PROMOTES
ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES
VIA DESIGNATION

By John Walsh, Contributing Editor

Ever hear of a Groundwater Guardian Green Site? Jon Lobenstine wants to make sure you do.

Little Bennett Golf Course, one of nine public courses operated by the Montgomery County Revenue Authority in Maryland (MCRA), completed an application to evaluate and document its groundwater-friendly practices to earn the designation awarded by The Groundwater Foundation (www.groundwater.org), a nonprofit organization based in Nebraska.

There are about 38 golf courses throughout the country with such a designation.

A site, in this case a golf course, undergoes annual soil testing for precise fertilizer inputs and has no-application buffers around bodies of water. By using drought-tolerant turfgrass cultivars and tracking irrigation usage and efficiency, course management helps protect and conserve local water supplies.

"We're trying to get the word out that golf courses aren't bad environmentally," says Lobenstine, the director of agronomy for the nine MCRA courses, all of which are registered as Groundwater Guardian Green Sites. "People don't truly understand how conscientious we are when managing golf courses. So many great resources are available to help us care for the world around us."

Earning the groundwater designation is part of an overall approach to promoting and being recognized for

environmental stewardship, Lobenstine says, adding that another goal of all nine courses is to be Audubon International-certified in two years. Currently, one is — Little Bennett. The environment is important to MCRA partly because its courses are located in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Internally, Lobenstine formed an environmental committee to analyze how the MCRA can make its golf course operations more environmentally friendly. In doing so, Lobenstine came across The Groundwater Foundation.

"The designation helps us acknowledge our green efforts," he says, adding the no-cost process to be designated a Groundwater Guardian Green Site is a straightforward process that aligns with Audubon's application. "We want to redefine ourselves as a company, and the environment is one of our core values. The environment, beyond the golf course and into the world around us, is our responsibility."

Lobenstine says most superintendents have already implemented the practices the Groundwater Foundation uses as criteria to designate a

golf course: using native plants, soil and water testing, proper disposal of rinsate, and no pesticide or fertilizer applications around wetlands and bodies of water (50- to 100-foot buffer zones).

"The superintendents I've talked to about the Groundwater Guardian Green Sites program are intrigued by it because it's a relatively new program that provides a solid resource for our environmental goals, but none have heard of it," he says.

The Groundwater Guardian Green Sites program began in 2007 to recognize good stewards of groundwater by encouraging managers of highly managed green spaces to implement, measure and document their groundwater friendly practices. Interested facilities can become involved in the Groundwater Guardian Green Site program by visiting the foundation's Web site at www.groundwater.org and downloading the program application

So the next time someone mentions the Groundwater Guardian Green Sites program, you can say you're in the know, thanks to Jon Lobenstine. ■



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