

As green as it gets

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On a still morning in Maryland, the air is humid, thick with marsh sweat. Just inland from the Chesapeake Bay, looking out over rustling, waist-high grasses at the graceful majesty of a great blue heron, it's easy to forget you're in the middle of a round of golf.

Queenstown Harbor Golf Course in Queenstown, Md., has achieved the near impossible: a seamless fusion of an undisturbed wildlife refuge and 36 holes of golf.

The golf course, owned and managed by Atlantic Golf as part of The Brick Cos., opened June 29, 1991, with 18 holes, and has expanded to two 18-hole sides known as The River and The Lakes. John Anderes was hired as director of grounds in January 2005 from South River Golf Course in Edgewater, Md., also owned by TBC. Anderes manages the course with a \$1.5-million maintenance budget, all of which is spent with environmental practice in mind.



Queenstown Harbor Golf Course. Photo: Queenstown Harbor

Queenstown Harbor was designated a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary in May 2008, becoming one of 688 golf courses in the world to hold the title.

"The course started off on the right foot," Anderes says. "As part of the Audubon program, our superintendents do a bit more monitoring and wildlife habitat work than a typical superintendent probably would."

That work includes everything from using organic fertilizer to serving beverages in corn-based, biodegradable cups. Overseeing the daily-fee, environmentally-centered course is a challenge Anderes has welcomed with open arms.



John Anderes (l.) and Nick Brandt, golf course superintendent at The River course. Photo: Queenstown Harbor

"I've always wanted to be Audubon certified, and this is the perfect site to do it, so I came in and brought it to everyone's attention, and we took it from there," he says.

To promote the health of the bay, Anderes and his crew tries to reduce nitrogen and other chemical run off. Nearby chicken company Perdue makes fertilizer from its chicken manure. Anderes has applied the organic fertilizer for two and a half years and is pleased with the results.

"It works really well," he says. "It helps Perdue get rid of their waste, and it's a good source of organic nitrogen for us. It helps the industry and the peninsula, as well as our golf course."

When possible, Anderes doesn't apply fertilizer at all. This year, Anderes added 5.5 acres to the designated low- or no-mow areas that make up about 5 percent of the course's total 790 acres of land. These areas use fewer labor hours, less gas and are mowed about once a year.

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

In areas mowed regularly, grass clippings are caught in baskets and taken to the course's compost pile. About 90 percent of grass refuse is recycled. As for the mowers themselves, Anderes is chomping at the bit for hybrid greens mowers to come through. In the meantime, as much of his maintenance equipment as possible is electric.

Drainage from the golf course flows to the center of the property, where it's stored and used for irrigation water, and water used to clean equipment drains to an environmental wash center. Used cleaning water goes into a main sump and through a filtration process that uses microbial organisms to clean the water of impurities. Once processed, the water is reused.

By not letting used water run off the course, Anderes estimates he saves about 80 percent of water. Buffer zones border all ponds on the property to prevent pesticide contamination.

"We are committed to slowly reducing our pesticide usage, although environmental stresses make it tempting to use more," Anderes says.

Looking forward, Anderes hopes to continue what he and his crew are doing now. He plans to add more native areas and buffer strips around ponds, cut pesticides and emissions, and is keeping his ear to the ground for new environmental technology. Queenstown Harbor serves as a trial site for environmental practices in the area, and Anderes plans to continue this offering to the community to keep both the environment and Queenstown Harbor at the fore of eco-friendly golf.

Aside from starting the Audubon process, two important practices to improve environmentalism at any golf course are to use integrated pest management and create low- or no-maintenance areas on the course, which will enhance the course and budget, Anderes says. But he insists linking with Audubon is the most important step. Many superintendents don't think they have the time or the resources, but in fact every superintendent can accomplish the program, Anderes says.

"It's a great tool to formalize what you're already doing," he says. "Most superintendents in our profession do what Audubon requires anyway. It's a matter of going through the process and tweaking your practices. Providing green space is one of the biggest things you can do in today's environmental climate. It's an everybody-wins situation." *GCI*