



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS**  
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Hillendale Park Office  
10611 New Hampshire Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20903  
Phone: 301-495-2530 Fax: 301-434-4796

MCPB  
Agenda #3  
04/07/11

March 31, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Gene Giddens, Acting Deputy Director *G. Giddens*  
Christine Brett, Chief, Enterprise Division *C. Brett*

SUBJECT: Annual Presentation by the Montgomery County Revenue Authority on its Operation of the Commission's Three Golf Courses Noted in the Lease Agreement – Needwood, Northwest, and Little Bennett

---

In accordance with the Lease Agreement entered into on October 26, 2006, between the Commission and the Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA), an annual presentation is to be provided to the Commission by MCRA. Attached, for your review, is a copy of MCRA's Annual Briefing on the operation of the Commission's three golf courses during the 2010 calendar year.

Sligo Creek Golf Course, which was originally part of the Lease Agreement, was extracted from the lease on April 1, 2009, but MCRA continued to operate the course under a First Amendment to the Golf Course Lease Agreement until October 1, 2009. Since that time, MCRA has managed the course under two separate, but continuous Operating Agreements with the Commission. The latter Operating Agreement will terminate on November 30, 2012.

GG:CB:pls  
Attachment



# **Montgomery County Revenue Authority**

## **Annual Planning Board Briefing 2011**

**Purpose and Background:**

As required by section 7.2.6 of the lease between the Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA) and Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning (M-NCPPC), the tenant shall appear before the Montgomery County Planning Board. The Tenant shall make a presentation of its operation of the Golf System during the preceding calendar year, including (1) significant activities conducted by Tenant in support of its obligations under this Lease, including (i) a schedule of fees charged at each M-NCPPC golf course with a comparison to the market, (ii) number of rounds played at each M-NCPPC golf course, and (iii) community outreach activities and programs to meet its commitments with regard to accessibility, including the participation rates; (2) a summary and representation of its compliance with the terms of this Lease; (3) any updates to the Golf Master Plan; (4) current capital improvement plan; and (5) any other information reasonably requested by Landlord.

On April 15, 2006 the MCRA began operating four golf courses owned and operated by Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. As such, the Montgomery County Golf system became nine golf courses. Initially, the four golf courses were operated under a Letter of Intent and an Operating Agreement. Then, the parties entered into a long term lease agreement for the operation of the M-NCPPC golf courses in Montgomery County.

On April 1, 2009 the Sligo Creek Golf Course, which was originally part of the Lease Agreement, was extracted from the lease. The MCRA continued to operate the course under a First Amendment to the Golf Course Lease Agreement until October 1, 2009. Since that time, MCRA has managed the course under two separate, but continuous Operating Agreements with the Commission. The latter Operating Agreement will terminate on November 30, 2012.

**Structure of the Report:**

This report and accompanying presentation will provide an overview of the key operational items from the previous year. The items covered will satisfy the requirements of paragraph 7.2.6 of the lease, as well as other items that the MCRA may feel are relevant. The report will flow in the same order as the items listed in the lease beginning with operational details and ending with updates on the Golf Master Plan and current capital improvement plan. We are happy to follow up with any additional requests the Landlord may request during the presentation.

**Activities in Support of Lease Obligations**

**Pricing**

In 2007 the MCRA adopted a supply and demand pricing structure which did away with the posting of established rates. We implemented a system that monitors tee sheet utilization by 2-hour segments by day of the week. This information allows us to adjust pricing to maximize utilization and the revenue potential of each property. As a result we are able to offer greater discounts during “off-peak” times to golfers than in the past, while still creating more revenue for the property.

### **Rounds Played:**

Overall, there were 354,363 rounds played at M-NCPPC and MCRA courses in Calendar Year(CY) 2010 versus 363,165 rounds in CY2009, which represents a 2% decline in total rounds. There were 173,713 rounds in CY2010 versus 185,165 rounds in CY2009 played at the four M-NCPPC golf courses, which represents a 6% decrease. There were 180,650 rounds in CY2010 versus 178,000 rounds in CY2009 played at MCRA courses, which represents a 1% increase in rounds. According to Golf Datatech, which provides data for PGA of America and National Golf Course Owners Association, the total rounds nationally for 2010 decreased by 2%, regional market of DE, DC, and MD increased by 2.4%, and local DC and Baltimore market increased by 1% in CY2010. In conclusion, the 2 % decrease of rounds played in the entire system was consistent with the national average. However, the golf system as a whole did not perform as well when compared to the regional and local market.

The rounds within the system fluctuated more than expected in CY2010 with rounds decreasing in the Parks golf courses and increasing slightly in the MCRA system. We believe this is attributable to several reasons including the following.

- Needwood – The construction on the dam between holes 14 and 15 ran longer into the season than expected. Although the course was in good shape golfers went to other courses to avoid the construction and closed holes. After construction it was very difficult to get the golfers back but we feel this will not be the case in CY2011.
- Northwest – Rounds had a significant decrease at this property as well. This golf course tends to flood during heavy rain. We have made a management change at the property, completed extensive drainage work, and have begun a bunker renovation. These changes should stabilize this property.
- Little Bennett – this facility had the smallest decline of rounds of the Park golf courses. This is surprising considering the high end public courses in the area which offered significant discounts. We believe CY2011 will be another challenging year for this property.

Although there seems to be a renewed optimism in the golf industry, we believe this will be another challenging year. There will continue to be additional pressure on the system from high end daily fee and low end private courses. We have already seen significant pricing discounts from some of these properties which we believe will become more aggressive as the season progresses. The MCRA has introduced several new programs for the season that utilize the strength of our 9 course system compared to the individual properties of our competitors. In addition, we must continue to monitor the changing demographics of the County as we assess the feasibility of sustaining a 9 course system.

## **Commitment to the Environment**

MCRA continued its pursuit of environmental initiatives on the golf courses in a number of ways in 2010. In a year that provided the highest snowfall total and the hottest summer in memory, our golf courses overall held up better than many public or private golf courses in the area. This is due in large part to the progress we have made over the years in balancing our soils through fertilizer applications that target areas deficient in nutrients, and NOT applying fertilizer when and where it is unnecessary.

- ***Groundwater Guardian program:*** All 9 of the MCRA golf courses were designated Groundwater Guardian Green Sites last year! In this national program developed by the Groundwater Foundation, Little Bennett Golf Course became the first facility of any kind to earn the achievement in the State of Maryland, and our other eight courses followed suit. The program honors highly-managed green spaces - such as golf courses, ball fields, educational campuses, and residential, recreational, and office parks – that carry out safe groundwater practices that protect against chemical use and pollution prevention.
- ***Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses:*** Our facilities continued to earn new levels of achievement in this Audubon International advisory service, which helps golf courses develop effective conservation and wildlife enhancement programs. Most of our facilities completed the certification components *Chemical Use Reduction and Safety* and *Water Conservation*, and continue their efforts in 2011 looking at the next part of the program, which includes *Wildlife Habitat Management*, *Community Outreach*, and *Water Quality Management*.
- ***Press:*** MCRA's environmental initiatives were acknowledged in a number of trade publications this year including (Attachment #2)
  - *The Golf Course Trades*,  
[http://www.golfcoursetrades.com/news\\_detail.php?recordID=91](http://www.golfcoursetrades.com/news_detail.php?recordID=91)
  - *Golfdom* <http://www.golfdom-digital.com/golfdom/201007/#pg12>
  - *Golf Course Business*  
<http://www.golfbusiness.com/flash/digital/2010September/default.html#24>

## **Research**

Our superintendents were busy doing a lot more than just growing grass this year! One of the big foci for our organization is to do our own research, to try to find more efficient and more responsible ways of managing the properties.

MCRA's environmental research program at the Executive 9 golf course at Needwood Golf Course continues to investigate non-chemical alternatives to pest control. The program also continues to evaluate the use of warm-season grasses such as bermudagrass and zoysiagrass, which traditionally require significantly less water, fertilizer, and pesticides to maintain. Last year's research led to an expansion of a major component in this program, which is the conversion from perennial ryegrass fairways to bermudagrass fairways. This year, we converted an entire fairway while keeping it open for play.

Although it was wet for a couple of weeks, we discovered that this is a viable option for converting to a grass that will reduce in a major way our environmental footprint.

The success of this project will lead to conversions at other facilities starting at Rattlewood in 2011; there is usually only enough water to get through a few months of the year until severe cutbacks are made and maintenance staff primarily hand waters critical parts of the course. We anticipate sprigging 2 fairways at Rattlewood to bring our research into reality.

Sligo Creek began another similar program this year. By partnering with 3 Tier Technologies, whose products consist primarily of organic soil amendments and beneficial microbes used to manage turf disease and insects, we experimented with using reduced rates of pesticides on greens, tees, and fairways for an entire season. This protocol, combined with raising the height of cut about 20-30% on these most intensely manicured areas of the course, seemed to be successful during times of year when disease pressure is not as intense. More studies will be conducted in 2011 to ascertain whether we can implement a similar program system-wide in the future. The overall reduction in chemical use from this program was about 20% during a summer when this area experienced some of the most intense disease pressure in memory.

#### **Community Outreach Activities:**

In 2010, the Revenue Authority was able to remain committed to its current outreach activities while adding several new and exciting programs.

#### **Montgomery County Golf – Loyalty Club**

In 2010, MCRA continued the Loyalty Club program which began in 2009 and yielded over 13,000 participants. This free membership program provided golfers the ability to earn free golf cart rental and/or free rounds based on Loyalty Club members' patronage of the MCG facilities through accumulating points. In 2010 we added a "Frequent Player Pass" program that was sold for \$199 for the year. This program offered discounted cart and green fees along with merchandise discounts. Over 400 of these passes were sold

#### **Family Golf**

The Family Golf program was extended to all courses in 2010 and a free clinic was held each week at a selected course on Saturday or Sunday throughout the summer. These events offered reduced prices for families playing nine-holes. A course within a course was set up at all facilities to add to the enjoyment of the golf experience for those new to the game. Special scorecards were also provided, and a special Family Rate of \$10 per player was offered after 5pm at all courses and anytime Monday – Friday at the 9-hole courses.

### **Golf Industry Supported Initiatives**

We continue to support the golf industry programs to grow the game. In 2010, MCRA continued and expanded the Get Golf Ready program. The program offers five weeks of introductory golf lessons for \$99.00. We had more than 500 participants in the program this year. Other industry programs that we participated in this year include; Take Your Daughter to the Course Day, Women in Golf Day, and bring Your Kids to the Driving Range Day

### **Keep Golf Going**

This program was established in 2010 as a follow program to the graduates of Get Golf Ready. A series of 5 lessons for \$99 that focused on the skills players gained in the Get Golf Ready program or a refresher course for those players that were looking to get back into the game. Each session included instruction and time on the golf course.

### **First Tee Montgomery County**

Another major commitment to junior golf and to the community is the MCRA's partnership with the First Tee Montgomery program. First Tee provides an opportunity to expose young people, who otherwise might not have an opportunity, to experience the sport of golf along with learning personal life skills that apply to their every day lives. The program is now offered at Laytonville, Needwood, Northwest, and Sligo Creek Golf Courses. The First Tee mentoring program matches students with volunteers who will help them further develop an understanding of the sport and enhance their skill levels. The MCRA provides a 50 percent discount for the mentors and students. Another significant contribution to First Tee is the donation of Laytonville Golf Course for a major First Tee fundraising event that provides one of the most significant single revenue generators for First Tee Montgomery on an annual basis.

### **Junior Golf and School Programs**

The MCRA has made a significant commitment to junior golf in the form of clinics, and more recently, camps designed to expose young people to the game of golf. In all, the MCRA had over 8,500 participants in a broad range of camps or clinics last year.

The MCRA additionally provides extensive support to the Montgomery County Public Schools golf program.

The MCRA provides to 25 public high schools free access to all facilities for tryouts, practices, matches, and season ending events – an estimated value of more than \$50,000.

In 2010, MCRA again partnered with the Montgomery County Public Schools and the Recreation Department to provide the Middle School Golf Program. Four courses established a program in which middle school children participated in a six-week long spring and fall program that offered one day a week of instruction and one day a week of spirited on-course competition.

Finally, based on the program that was conducted as a partnership with Goshen Elementary School and Laytonsville Golf Course, golf continues to be a part of the physical education curriculum for all fifth graders in Montgomery County.

#### **MCRA League, Tournament, and Charitable Play**

MCRA facilities also provide an opportunity for golfers to participate in league and tournament play, providing both recreation and a bit of friendly competition. The MCRA has continued to grow this segment of golf operations. With over 48 different leagues across eight of its golf courses, leagues and tournaments accounted for over 18,000 rounds of golf in 2010. That same year, the MCRA held the sixth annual Montgomery County Golf Summer Amateur Tournament at Laytonsville and Northwest Golf Courses with over 180 participants.

In 2010, the MCRA continued our two new competitive programs introduced in 2009. The Second Annual MCG High School Invitational was conducted in October and included 72 of the County's top high school golfers. The students competed in boys' and girls' divisions and included students from both public and private high school. We also held our Second Annual Singha Cup Series. This event was open to all golfers who competed for prizes over a six week event at six different MCG courses culminating with a championship match and awards dinner at Rattlewood Golf Course. Over \$4,400 in prizes were awarded throughout the season.

The MCRA donated rounds of golf to over 100 local charities, including schools and church groups, at a value of over \$20,000 in 2010. All nine MCRA golf courses participated in the Annual Patriots Golf Day for our third season. This was a joint initiative with the PGA of America and the United States Golf Association that raised contributions for the Wounded Warriors. This organization supports families of those who have become disabled or lost their lives in the line of military duty. The MCRA courses collected and matched contributions of all golfers who played that day. The MCRA donated \$1.00 for each green fee that was processed on Saturday, September 1 and collected over \$7,200 for this outstanding cause.

#### **Compliance with Lease**

The Revenue Authority believes it is and has been in compliance with the details and overall intent of the lease. The above information outlines the operational initiatives that have taken place over the past year to satisfy our lease obligations. Additionally, we have submitted all required reports and continue to move towards creating a financially sustainable golf system.



### **Golf Master Plan Update**

In these continuing tough economic times, it is essential that funds are expended in a diligent manner to ensure facility and system sustainability. The MCRA has not made any significant changes to the 2006 Master Plan's goal of refurbishing the golf courses but we have delayed the timing of the projects and modified the scope of the work so that it can be accomplished through in-house construction. Instead of making any major modifications to the golf course designs, we are now focused on renovations of the existing designs. These renovations renew the life expectancy of the asset and dramatically improve the playability for the golfer.

### **Capital Improvement Plan**

The MCRA does not propose new projects in the upcoming CIP for any of the Park's golf courses. The projects currently under renovation or in planning have been approved in previous CIP submittals. We will continue to focus on bunker renovations at all 3 courses, cart path repairs and improvements, course drainage, irrigation, and clubhouse improvements. We are currently working with an architect on the redesign of the northwest clubhouse interior which will result in a more efficient use of the space. Renderings are included in attachment #3.

During CY2010 the Revenue Authority made the following capital improvements. MCRA began in-house bunker renovations at Needwood Golf Course, rebuilding bunkers on holes #12-17. Bunker renovations and fairway drainage work were also started at Northwest Golf Course, and we hope to complete the work in 2011. Drainage work was also completed on some problem greens at Little Bennett. Additionally, the Needwood clubhouse exterior has been repaired and upgraded, which was part of the 2006 Master Plan. The extreme summer heat put significant stress on our cooling systems which resulted in the replacement of the HVAC system at Little Bennett and changes to both Needwood and Northwest as well. In total the MCRA invested over \$200,000, in excess of \$100,000 in improvements and over \$100,000 in golf course maintenance equipment, at the M-NCPPC golf courses in CY2010.

### **Other Information Requested**

At the time of this report there were no additional items requested.

**Attachment 1  
Calendar Year over Year Rounds Comparison**

<b>Golf Course System</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	363,165	354,363	-8,802	-2.42%
<b>M-NCPPC Golf Courses</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	185,165	173,713	-11,452	-6.18%
<b>MCRA Golf Courses</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	178,000	180,650	2,650	1.49%
<b>Sligo Creek</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	26,779	23,894	-2,885	-10.77%
<b>Little Bennett</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	31,406	30,334	-1,072	-3.41%
<b>Needwood</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	61,243	57,333	-3,910	-6.38%
<b>Northwest</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	65,737	62,152	-3,585	-5.45%
<b>Falls Road</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	47,236	48,574	1,338	2.83%
<b>Poolesville</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	29,514	29,039	-475	-1.61%
<b>Laytonsville</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	37,070	38,372	1,302	3.51%
<b>Hampshire Greens</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	31,549	30,104	-1,445	-4.58%
<b>Rattlewood</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Total Rounds	32,631	34,561	1,930	5.91%



Tuesday March 29, 2011

[Login](#)  
[Register](#)

# Little Bennett Golf Course Becomes First Facility in Maryland Designated Groundwater Guardian Green Site

**Accolade is Latest Citing Montgomery County Revenue Authority's Commitment to Green Golf Course Management**

Google Custom Search



**Media Kit**

Digital Edition

- [Subscribe](#)
- [Articles](#)
- [News](#)
- [Buying Guide](#)
- [Releases](#)
- [Companies](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Media Kit](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Home](#)



As part of the ongoing celebration of Earth Day 2010, The Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA) continues to build on its commitment to improving the environmental footprint of all MCRA golf courses. By practicing quality groundwater and environmental stewardship, MCRA's Little Bennett Golf Course was recently designated as a 2010 Groundwater Guardian Green Site by The Groundwater Foundation, the first facility in the State of Maryland to receive this recognition.

Groundwater Guardian Green Sites is a program of The Groundwater Foundation, a nonprofit organization with a mission to educate and motivate the public to care for groundwater. The program honors highly-managed green spaces – such as golf courses, ball fields, educational campuses, and residential, recreational, and office parks– that carry out safe groundwater practices against chemical use and pollution prevention.

**Friends of Golf Course Trades**

International Groundwater Foundation



**GCSAA**  
AFFILIATE MEMBER



**MEMBER**

MCRA's Little Bennett Golf Course completed an application to evaluate and document its groundwater-friendly practices to earn this exclusive designation. The site undergoes annual soil testing for precise fertilizer inputs and has "no-application" buffers around all bodies of water. By using drought tolerant turfgrass cultivars and tracking irrigation usage and efficiency, Little Bennett Golf Course helps protect and conserve local water supplies. MCRA is working to certify its 8 other golf courses as a Groundwater Guardian Green Site.

"Little Bennett Golf Course and the entire Montgomery County Golf system is committed to environmental stewardship as one of its core values. The Groundwater Guardian Green Site program, along with our designation as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, gives us the opportunity to promote our environment-friendly practices," said Matt Burton, golf course superintendent of Little Bennett Golf Course.

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. Other interested sites are encouraged to get involved in the Groundwater Guardian Green Site program by visiting The Groundwater Foundation's website and downloading the current program application at [www.groundwater.org/gg/greensites.html](http://www.groundwater.org/gg/greensites.html), by emailing [guardian@groundwater.org](mailto:guardian@groundwater.org), or by calling (800) 858-4844.

To learn more about Little Bennett Golf Course's recent designation as a 2010 Groundwater Guardian Site, or other MCRA environmental initiatives, Director of Agronomy, Montgomery County Golf, Jon Lobenstine, is available for interview.

The Groundwater Foundation is a non-profit organization based in Lincoln, Nebraska with a mission to educate and motivate the public to care about and for groundwater. Since its inception in 1985, the Foundation has offered

various educational programming for youth and adults. To learn more, visit [www.groundwater.org](http://www.groundwater.org). The Groundwater Guardian Green Site program is supported by Cargill, the Nebraska Environmental Trust, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7 Pollution Prevention Program, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



© Copyright 2004 - 2011 • The Trades Publishing Company • All Rights reserved.  
20 Our Way Dr. • Crossville, TN 38555 • (931) 484-8819 • Fax: (931) 484-8825  
The Trades | Resort Trades | Landscape Architect Trades | Park & Recreation Trades  
Terms Of Use | Privacy Policy | Webmaster | Company Directory



## APPROACH SHOTS

### PROVING GROUND

JON LOBENSTINE HAS TAKEN WHAT STARTED AS A WATER INITIATIVE AND DEVELOPED A FULL-BLOWN ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM FOR HIS EMPLOYER'S NINE COURSES

By Peter Blais

**J**ON LOBENSTINE FEELS A SENSE OF PRIDE AND ACCOMPLISHMENT EACH TIME HE LOOKS OUT OVER THE NINE golf courses he oversees as director of agronomy for Montgomery County, Maryland. On the surface, he sees green grass and happy players, but he knows the source of those golfers' smiles lies below the surface. Because it's there that the seeds of Lobenstine's environmental sustainability initiatives are literally and figuratively taking root.

Partly from personal conviction and partly at the behest of his employer, the Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA), Lobenstine has committed to improving the groundwater quality and environmental footprint of all nine facilities under the agency's management. He admits that most golfers haven't noticed the changes, but rest assured that the MCRA and the turf on the courses recognize the difference. For example, after developing



Jon Lobenstine has introduced a number of programs to create a more "natural" landscape at Montgomery County (Maryland)

"dry programs" for the facilities' irrigation standards—a strategy in which no water is applied until the operators begin to see signs of wilt on fairways, tee and greens—Lobenstine has reduced water consumption by approximately 30 million gallons at all nine facilities. That translates to a 15 percent to 20 percent annual savings at each course.

When they do turn on the water, Lobenstine and his

continued on page 24

Continued from page 23

team leverage the power of irrigation technology to ensure they're applying precise amounts to the specific areas where it's needed. "We've [also] started using part-circle rather than full-circle irrigation heads that allow us to maintain elbow areas where fairways meet rough with less water," he adds.

This is all part of a broader program to limit the amount of water being applied to rough areas. By watering these regions less frequently and allowing them to appear a little browner than "normal" during the summer, Lobenstine is laying the groundwork for stronger turf while providing a quicker playing experience for golfers.

"Areas where we have irrigation in the rough are still watered occasionally to keep them from going totally dormant, and primary rough such as green surrounds are maintained with more attention so golfers still get the full effect of great conditions

on greens, tees and fairways," he says. "Limiting water use and forcing roots to go deeper in search of water also makes for healthier turf during the dry season."

For all the success the agency's had reducing water consumption, the MCRA's environmental campaign extends well beyond conservation. Lobenstine and his staff have also introduced strategies to minimize pollution, reduce chemical inputs, maintain larger buffer zones around waterways (50 feet) and wetlands (100 feet), and dispose of rinsate and chemicals where they won't harm the environment.

On the technical front, Lobenstine and his team have committed to recalibrating application equipment monthly, replacing worn nozzles, and routinely sending soil and water samples to labs for study. They've also reduced the amount of maintained fairway acreage and realized a healthy return on investment. (Narrowing the fairways by 30 percent on one course yielded an annual savings of \$18,000 in chemical applications.) They've even hired a consultant to provide advice on how to maximize the nutrient mix in the soil.

"We may spend \$5,000 annually per course on lab work and consultant fees, but that might help save \$10,000 to \$20,000 in chemical treatments," Lobenstine notes.

To be fair, there are costs and inherent challenges associated with such broad-based efforts. For starters, hand-watering is more time- and labor-intensive (read, expensive) than traditional irrigation, and meeting the requirements of Audubon International or any similar agency requires an ability to, in the words of Lobenstine, "think outside the box" while staying abreast of updates in conditioning techniques, products and practices. Even so, Lobenstine is quick to note that any extra labor expense associated with practices such as hand-watering are more than offset by the resulting water savings and turf health, while adapting to new ways of doing a job should be par for the proverbial course for any operator.

"We've maintained optimum conditioning and received great reviews from players," he says. "We may get an occasional comment about the increase in out-of-play natural areas we've allowed to return to a more natural state, but the natural areas give the course a more links-style appearance and better define the holes, plus save on various inputs."

In an era when the economics of course maintenance and increasing environmental regulations are converging in a perfect storm that could threaten even the healthiest of operations, fewer inputs offer the type of outputs that sit well on Main Street and the balance sheet. **78**

*Bob Williams is a Montpelier-based freelance writer.*

## Living Lab

IN ADDITION TO NUMEROUS GREEN POLICIES THAT HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED at the Montgomery County (Maryland) Revenue Authority's nine facilities, Jon Lobenstine has experimented with the use of biofungicides to help reduce chemical inputs on the courses. The products, which utilize microorganisms derived from plants, bacteria or certain minerals, represent what the director of agronomy dubs a "major agronomic shift" in the protection of turf from various diseases.

"Biofungicides are showing a lot of promise, especially in geographic areas where it's difficult to grow certain types of grasses," Lobenstine notes. "As more and more courses use products like this to improve a plant's defense system, it becomes more enticing to golf course operators."

Last summer, Lobenstine used three test plots on a practice green to research the use of an isoparaffin-based biostimulant that works to prime the turf's genes, enhance its natural defenses and kill or inhibit fungal growth. He applied the product to one plot and saw no disease until late June (2009); however, as the season progressed, the area treated only with biostimulants showed considerable signs of disease. This season, he supplemented the biostimulant regimen with a 50 percent rate of traditional fungicides, and initial results have been promising.

"It looks like we could decrease our pesticide use by 50 percent," says Lobenstine, adding that treatments cost approximately \$125 per acre.

Although he admits it will "take some time" for most operators to fully embrace bio-based alternatives, Lobenstine envisions a day when their use will be widespread. Even then, however, he encourages owners to test the products at their facility to gauge how they interact with the soil conditions of their particular site.

"The universities do a good job with research and testing, but each course has its own microclimate, and the effectiveness of different inputs will vary," Lobenstine says. "It's a simple matter to devote a rear corner of a practice green to research."



BRIGHT  
IDEA

Off The Fringe

# Water Friendly

MARYLAND COURSE PROMOTES ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES VIA DESIGNATION

By John Walsh, Contributing Editor

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

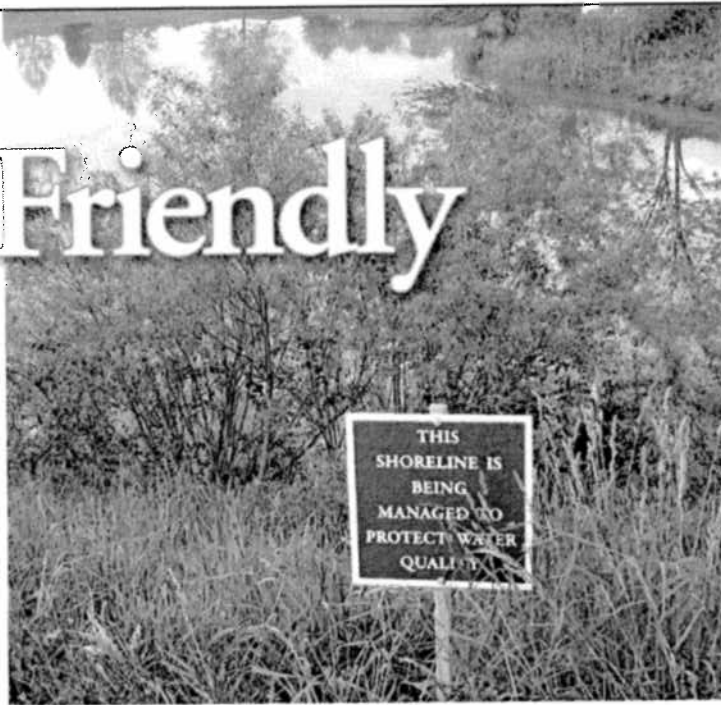
Little Bennett Golf Course, one of nine public courses operated by the Montgomery County Revenue Authority in Maryland (MCRA), completed an application to evaluate and document its groundwater-friendly practices to earn the designation awarded by The Groundwater Foundation ([www.groundwater.org](http://www.groundwater.org)),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

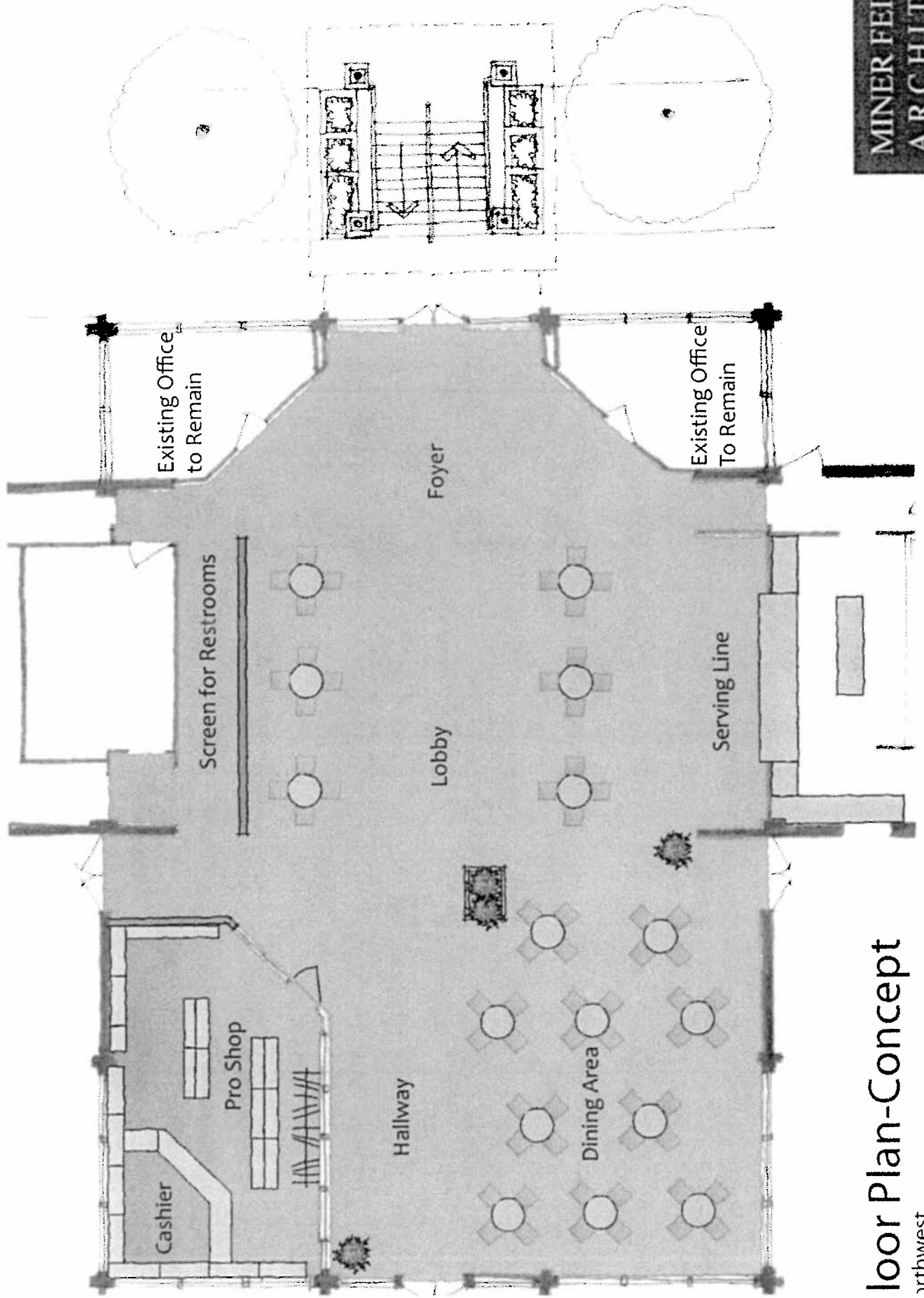
"The superintendents I've talked to about the Groundwater Guardian Green Sites program are intrigued by it because it's a relatively new program that provides a solid resource for our environmental goals, but none have heard of it," he says.

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](http://www.groundwater.org) and downloading the program application.

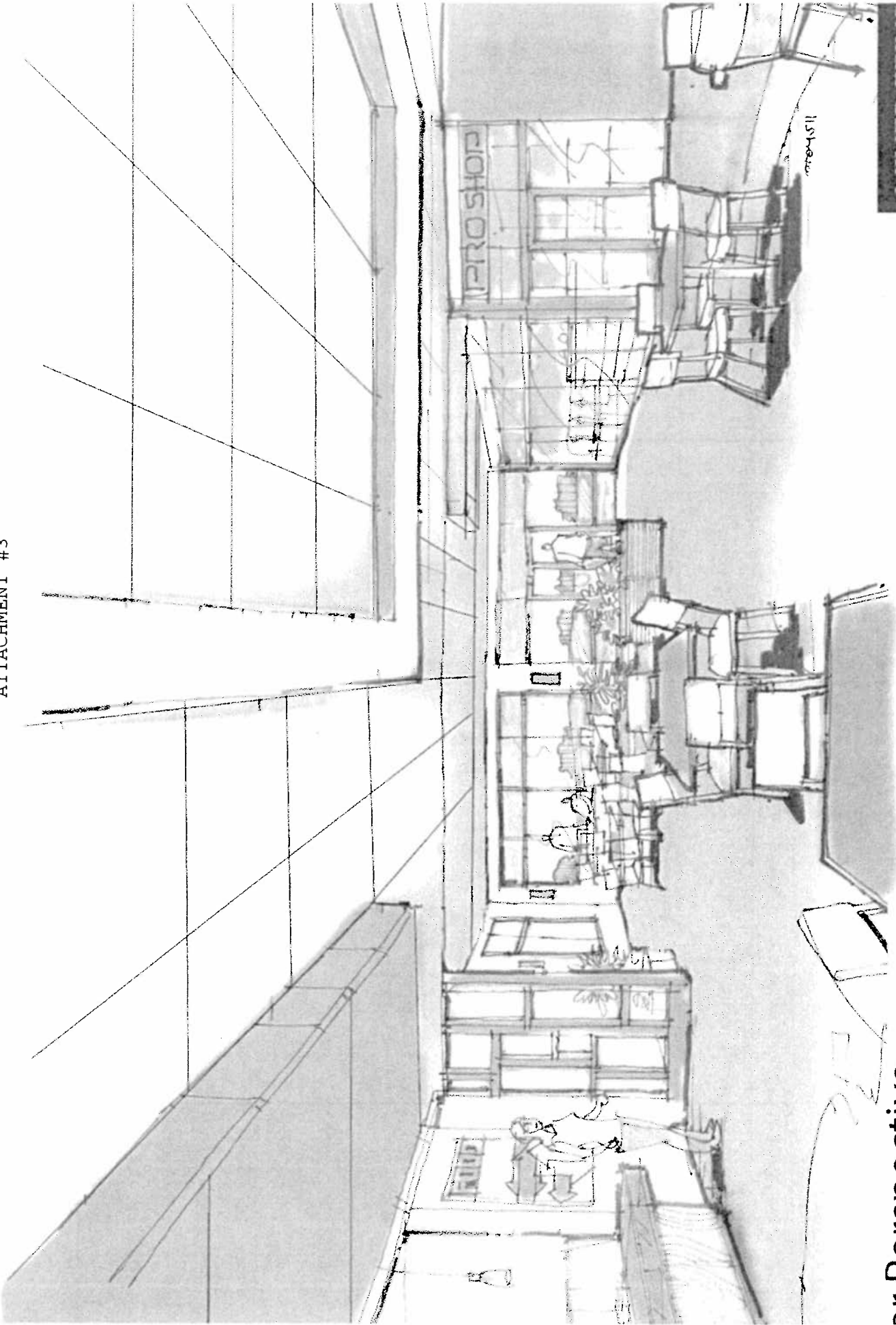
So the next time someone mentions the Groundwater Guardian Green Sites program, you can say you're in the know, thanks to Jon Lobenstine. ■

PHOTO BY MATT BURTON





1st Floor Plan-Concept  
northwest



or Perspective