

new GREENS BRING new CHALLENGES TO BLUEHERON GC

BLUE HERON GOLF COURSE



by: Delaney Cha

This past summer, Blue Heron Golf Course, located on Kent Island, Maryland completed its green renovation project for the front nine holes of the par 63 course.

The new greens, which are "state-of-the-art" USGA greens doubled the size of the original greens and enhanced the drainage system to help the greens drain better. The renovations began in February 27, 2023 and ended on July 27, 2023, taking exactly five months to complete.

The decision to renovate the greens was an anticipated project for a few years, ever since Eric Beaufait joined the Blue Heron team in 2005.

"We decided to do the renovations because the greens were too difficult for the average golfer to play. The greens were small, crowned greens," said Eric. "On top of that, they didn't do well in the heat during the summer and with the humidity. They were old style push up greens, built in the '50s. In the 50s they just built turtle shell greens where water would drain off the side and down the front and that was basically their drainage system. The new style for the USGA greens have drainage underneath of them, with a stone base, and sand on top of that so everything drains quickly."

As Eric and the team at Blue Heron continued working, they observed that more people were more interested in playing the back nine.

"As we went along, we found that more people wanted to play the back because the greens were easier, bigger, more fun to play, and golfer friendly," he said. "We're missing a lot on the front because everyone wants to play the same nine. We decided that it would be better for the golfer and for the course in general to upgrade the greens."

Eventually Eric and those involved with the renovation project sent a proposal to the Commissioners of Queen Annes County about the potential project.

"We put together the dream for the commissioners and said 'What do you think?' and they were very supportive," said Eric. "The commissioners have always been supportive of the golf course because they see it not only as an active senior center for older people to do something, but an activity that anyone can do. The kids can do it, the ladies, the guys, the seniors. It's active recreation for everyone."

At the beginning of the renovation, there were very few set backs for the project, which put the construction ahead of schedule.

Eric said, "We ended up being way ahead construction wise because we had a warm winter. The construction company was ahead on all of their projects and ended up bringing in extra crew to get everything done."

However, the weather during the spring time caused an eventual delay due to the temperatures.

"The only delay was the cold spring. We had that time for about a month where nighttime temperatures were always in the 40's, maybe 50's. There wasn't a lot of rain for while, which wasn't a huge issue because we have irrigation, but with the cold weather, the soil temperatures never rose above 55 so there wasn't any growth," he said. "That was our biggest delay, it took us back about two and a half to three weeks of opening because of the cold spring."

As the greens were being built, excitement started to grow within the community and at the course. Eric explained what golfers can expect with the new greens.

"I think the greens are going to be really challenging once they get up to speed. It will be easier for the average golfer to hit, but there will be more difficult and more challenging pin placement once on the green," he said. "There's a lot of shelves on them and they could fall off the sides. I think playability wise, they will be more fun. Easier to get on them, but challenging to maneuver when you're on them. I like the flow of how the holes turned out so the way they all play will be a lot more fun."

When it came to the designing of the greens, Eric worked with McDonald and Son's design group, who specialize in golf course design, building, construction, and renovation since 1984.

"We worked with McDonald and Sons which is a great company. They have a design engineer who went out, talked about how the hole played, what we would like to see, then they did the drawings," Eric said. "As they went along with the process, they began with building them out of dirt so you could see the elevation and change things."

"We wanted to make them bigger with more playability. A runoff area where people could chip or putt if they missed the green. From there, we wanted to move the greens a little closer to the bunkers. The whole process was going out with the design company and the

GREEN CONSTR 1 — REMOVAL OF ALL OLD MATERIAL AND CREATING A CAVITY WHERE THEY WILL INSTALL DRAINAGE AND PREPARE TO PUT GREENS MIX IN.



GREEN CONST 2 — PICTURE OF GREEN MIX INSTALLED AND GETTING READY TO FLOAT THE GREEN TO FINAL GRADES AND SLOPES.



GREEN CONST 4 — THIS IS A PICTURE OF THEM SHAPING THE NEW GREEN OUT OF DIRT AND SHOOTING ELEVATIONS.



superintendent and we all through got together and said 'Could we do this? How about this?'

"It was important to have the superintendent involved so they know about all of the drainage issues and other maintenance issues," he said. "Sometimes designers want to do crazy things. Golf pros want to do crazy things. The superintendent pulls us back down to earth and says we can't do that."

While the front nine of the course was closed during the renovation, the back nine was still opened and being utilized by the community. However, managing half of an open course was not as difficult as Eric thought it would be but it still had its challenges.

"It was certainly challenging, trying to get people to play 18. It altered the flow of everything, replaying the same nine. But most of the golfers were really excited. They knew that we were redoing it, and redoing it for them. Everybody was pretty understanding," Eric said.

"Some of the big challenges were the leagues, trying to make sure the leagues could get out and play on their scheduled days, and that they enjoyed themselves. For the most part things went pretty smooth. Everything kind of flowed together and everyone was excited for the project."

Over time, Eric and the Blue Heron staff came up with a plan to allow people to play 18 with only the back nine open.

"We ended up charging people for 9 holes of play rather than 18. If they wanted to play 18, we charged them 9 and said 'If you wanna keep going, come through the back door and we'll charge you the rest of the cost to play 18. We'll let you see what the number 10 tee box looks like,'" he said. "If it was backed up, they didn't have to complain that they paid for 18. They could decide if they wanted to continue playing."

Since Eric arrived at Blue Heron in 2005, he has been present for many of the renovations that have taken place at the course.

"It's been fun, we've done a lot of renovations and projects here. We built the cart barn and the pro shop. Built the driving range, and paved the parking lots. It's been fun, all of my little to do items on my checklist are being crossed off."

Eric plans to continue renovations at Blue Heron starting this fall with new cart paths.

"We're looking at renovating the cart paths this fall, so that will allow more people to get on when the course is wet. I also want to increase the sizes of the tee boxes as well. Those are the next two major renovations. From there, it's just maintaining and keeping up with the course."

GREEN REDO 5 & 6 ARE HOLES #5 & #6 FINISHED!

