

History of the Greater Washington Aviation Open



The Greater Washington Aviation Open (GWAO) was started in 1989 when Paul Bollinger, Executive Director of the Airport Consultants Council, invited his friends and peers at the National Business Aircraft Association (now National Business Aviation Association), the Air Transport Association (now A4A), Air Line Pilots Association, the Airport Operators Council International (now Airports Council International – North America), and the American Association of Airport Executives to work together to host an aviation charity golf and tennis tournament. The first meeting was held on June 30th at NBAA and was hosted by Pete West who has served as a Founding GWAO Board Member ever since. The meeting addressed the purpose of the event, where it would be held, who would be Honorary Chairman, and how it would be managed and promoted to other aviation associations and companies. From this humble beginning the GWAO has grown and flourished through the ups and downs of the aviation industry to become the largest aviation charity event in Washington, DC.

The initial intent of the tournament was clearly expressed as a time for the entire aviation community to share a special day of camaraderie on the links and tennis courts with an opportunity to raise funds for a deserving charity. This theme has remained true for decades as thousands of aviation leaders, government officials, and friends of the tournament have returned year after year to enjoy each other's company and to share this special moment for the industry.

The first GWAO was held on April 17, 1989, at Manor Country Club in Rockville, MD, the tournament was honored to have United States Senator Wendell Ford (R-KY) serve as the Honorary Chairman. Robert Aaronson, President of ATA was the Industry Chairman and Master of Ceremonies. In addition, the GWAO was pleased to welcome US Department of Transportation Secretary Sam Skinner to the event (the only DOT Secretary to attend). The fee for a Host foursome was \$1,000. The charity selected for the tournament proceeds was First Lady Barbara Bush's Project Literacy and Senator Ford donated

the tournament check for \$7,000 to Kentucky Educational Television which broadcasts the nation's General Equivalency Degree programming.

Following this successful inaugural event, the GWAO was held at Manor Country Club for three more years under the excellent leadership of their golf professional Coleman Plecker. The proceeds from the second and third tournaments were donated to the Children's National Medical Center and the USO. In the fourth year of the tournament, the GWAO Tournament Committee decided to select a charity with an aviation connection that would benefit most from the donation. After looking at several aviation oriented charities, it was decided that the Corporate Angel Network (CAN) out of Westchester, NY was most deserving. Early GWAO donations comprised 25% of CAN's operating budget. Working with Jay (and Marion) Weinberg and Pat Blum, CAN founders, the GWAO and CAN built an enduring relationship.

There was another change in the air at that time, seeking a location closer to the majority of players who lived in Virginia and an airport for those arriving from out of town, the tournament moved to Belle Haven Country Club in Alexandria, Virginia. The GWAO had been very lucky with the weather most years, but on the sixth anniversary we were hit with not one, but two wicked storms that all but washed out the course. This simply led to a head start on the activities at the Victory Reception and a lively auction by US Senator Conrad Burns, a professional cattle auctioneer in Montana, who did an incredible job of coaxing dollars from aviator's tight pockets. The tradition of having a Member of Congress serve as Honorary Chairman lasted for seven years.

After two years at Belle Haven the GWAO moved the tournament back to Manor Country Club for two additional years. The close proximity of Belle Haven CC was appreciated, but the limitations of the old clubhouse and smaller, tighter course made the decision necessary.

Breaking with tradition for Honorary Chairman, the eighth annual tournament at Manor Country Club featured one of the leading sportswriters in the country, John Feinstein. Having recently written a book on the professional golf tour, "A Good Walk Spoiled," John was the perfect Honorary Chair to regale the audience with stories about golf professionals and athletes he had come to know. Walt Starling, the well-known, DC traffic reporter who flew over the city for years giving reports also made a guest appearance.

The GWAO moved to Lakewood Country Club in Rockville, MD in 1997 for one year during the transition from a single 18-hole tournament to one offering morning and afternoon flights. This year we were particularly pleased to have serve as Honorary Chairman the PGA's leading teaching professional Jim McLean (1996) as voted by his peers. Everyone got the opportunity to participate in a lesson and to play with Jim. He was the consummate golf professional and he was warmly welcomed by the aviation community.

The success of the two-flight, morning/afternoon format was proof enough that the GWAO had grown in size to require a club with two 18-hole courses. The search began in earnest and after much debate about the pros and cons of each golf/tennis club, it was decided that Indian Spring Country Club, in Silver Spring, MD would be best for GWAO's budget and service requirements. Thanks to Tim Fredell, Assistant General Manager, the GWAO enhanced its reputation as a first-class event and all participants were treated like members of the club for years.

To celebrate the 10th Annual GWAO at Indian Spring Country Club in 1998 the tournament invited Senator Wendell Ford to return as Honorary Chairman. He was the first repeat Honorary Chairman and

one of our greatest supporters. In only nine years, the GWAO had raised \$250,000 for deserving charities including CAN. However, things were about to kick into high gear with the expansion to a two 18-hole golf club.

The GWAO Board, which was for all intents and purposes a loose confederation of friends, was made up of Paul “Bo” Bollinger, Pete West, Don Skiados, Jeff Lehman, Jon Ash, and Mary Miller serving as the core management team. Most served over two decades as volunteers, contributing hundreds of hours of time and support for the GWAO. Other notable members of the aviation community served on the Tournament Committee for various lengths of time and they all worked diligently to make the event the best ever. Everyone brought a special interest, background, connections, and desire to be of service, which made this all-volunteer board so very special and effective.

One of the things that differentiated the GWAO from so many other golf/tennis tournaments was the dinner and live auction. While most tournaments featured hamburgers and hotdogs, the GWAO offered a sit-down four-course dinner with steak and crab cakes and free flowing wine. The live auction was so ably started by Senator Conrad Burns and later assumed by Bo Bollinger, a true novice to the art of auctioneering. With the tremendous support of US and international airlines from all over the globe, the list of flights to wonderful destinations with hotel and rental car packages, made for a very lively and dynamic conclusion to the evening. In fact, due to the fantastic airline/hotel packages the auction was generating more than half of the tournament proceeds for the one-day event.

The companies that have supported the GWAO almost for its entire history deserve recognition as well. The Boeing Company has been the largest donor since the inception of the tournament. During Bill Barager’s tenure at Boeing there was nothing he would not do for the tournament because of the cause.

The 12th Annual GWAO in the year 2000 featured the first female Honorary Chair and Industry Honorary Chair. Lynne Russell, the noted and highly regarded news anchor for CNN Headline News teamed with Carol Hallett, President of ATA to lead the event. Lynne’s personality and good looks made for a fun day on the course as she autographed her recent book, “How to Win Friends, Kick Ass and Influence People” at the turn. Definitely a memory that will stay with all who shared the day on the links. The GWAO raised \$70,000 for CAN that year and an additional \$5,000 for EAA’s Young Eagles Program.

The GWAO tournament was facing a small challenge to keep people involved through the conclusion of the signing of the large, tournament proceeds check by the Honorary Chairman at the conclusion of the evening. In 2001, at the 13th Annual event, the GWAO started a raffle for a large, flat screen TV. They were the hottest electronic merchandise and everyone wanted one. This served to keep most everyone in their seats until the very end. Through the years, after everyone owned a flat-screen, we acquired HDTVs, then raffling iPads and other high-end electronics that have served to keep everyone’s attention to the final moment.

The 14th Annual GWAO in 2002 called for a redesign of the tournament’s well know logo “Ace” to offer tribute to the men and women who died in the 9/11 terrorist attack and all of the professionals who saved others while sacrificing themselves. A special red, white, and blue “Ace” standing proudly with a US flag graced the cover of the program. Special golf balls with the patriotic sayings that came out of the tragedy were presented to all participants. It was truly a moving event that was shared by the entire aviation community as \$101,000 was raised, making the GWAO one of the largest non-PGA golf charity events in the country.

For the 15th Annual GWAO the Corporate Angel Network asked their Fortune 500 Company members if they would like to contribute any of their products or services for the silent auction. This was a new offering that was a huge success thanks to CAN. Over \$105,000 was raised for CAN thanks to the tournament Hosts, sponsors, and airline donors.

The GWAO continued to be held at Indian Spring Country Club and each year the tournament proceeds increased with participation. The tournament sold out all 256 slots one year and the tennis tournament continued to attract a stalwart group of about two dozen players. The Club treated everyone like a member and it served to make the tournament one of the “go to” events of the year. Unfortunately, the Club had been purchased by a developer and there were plans to build on one or two of the courses. This drove the GWAO Tournament Committee to seek another venue after eight great years at Indian Spring.

The decision that summer, after a careful review of all golf clubs in the DC region with two, 18-hole courses came down to Lansdowne Resort being the best fit for the GWAO. Starting in 2006 the GWAO moved from Silver Springs, Maryland to Lansdowne, Virginia, where a beautiful hotel, golf clubhouse, and two championship courses waited for us. The top donor to the GWAO from almost the beginning has been Boeing and they continued to support the tournament as it grew in size and stature.

Flight Safety International came on board in 2006 and donated a flight training package that definitely increased attention at the auction. Without missing a beat, the GWAO raised \$125,000 for CAN in its first year at Lansdowne Resort. More important, the GWAO broke the \$1 million mark for charitable donations with the vast majority of the tournament proceeds going to CAN!

The GWAO created a website in late 2006 that allowed participants to register online without having to complete paperwork and processing a check. One small step for a tournament that was still managed by volunteers with full-time professional jobs. However, as was tournament decorum, a printed list of all participants (with their handicaps and affiliations) along with an on-site program was provided to all players to ensure that everyone knew who was sharing this special day.

Also in 2006, the GWAO started an aviation degree scholarship at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia. This high school was featured in the award winning movie, “Remember the Titans.” The school has students from over 80 countries around the world. Their dependence on aviation to be with family and friends is well known by these well-traveled students. The Scholarship Fund of Alexandria oversees the selection of deserving students for the GWAO Scholarship and recipients must have a financial need and maintain a B-average in their aviation degree program.

In May 2008, just prior to the “Great Recession,” the GWAO raised a record \$140,000 for CAN and the GWAO Scholarship Fund. The following years were very challenging for charity golf tournaments across the region, many failed. The GWAO tennis tournament attracted fewer and fewer players and tennis was dropped from the GWAO in 2009. However, the GWAO was able to maintain a strong core of aviation industry supporters and while the tournament didn’t sell-out both 18-hole courses, the GWAO still proved successful.

Due to the size of the GWAO and the increasing complexity of managing the event with the volunteer board, a part-time event planner was hired to assist with registration and other activities in 2009. Until this time, no administrative costs were paid from the tournament proceeds. However, the importance

of having a person who could manage the tournament was a cost that the GWAO had to assume after 20-years of doing it with all volunteer support.

In 2011, the GWAO transitioned from a “loose confederation of friends” to a 501(c)3 non-profit in its own right. No longer would the GWAO be a “pass-through” of tournament proceeds. This was a major step for the GWAO and opened other opportunities for charitable work. It was in this year and at the 23rd Annual GWAO, that future proceeds would be shared by CAN and the Veterans Airlift Command (VAC). CAN had grown from a small non-profit flying almost 1,000 patients a month on corporate aircraft to cancer treatment facilities around the country to a much larger organization flying well over 3,000 patients thanks to more than \$1.5 million in GWAO tournament proceeds. The GWAO Board saw in VAC another charitable aviation organization, in its infancy, that could benefit and fulfill its important mission for veterans with the generous support of the GWAO.

In 2012 another major change occurred as the presidency of the GWAO transitioned from Bo Bollinger to John Provenzano. After 24 years of leading the GWAO from a gleam in the eye of a few aviation leaders to the largest aviation charity event in Washington DC that had generated over \$1.8 million dollars for charity, it was time for new leadership to take the GWAO to the next level. At the 25th Anniversary GWAO, the Board gave special recognition to Bo for his work and dedication to the GWAO. Congressman Hal Rogers, Chairman of the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee, personally gave Bo a US flag flown over the Capitol and a framed Congressional Record tribute for his service. Like Senator Wendell Ford, this was Rep. Hal Rogers second time serving as Honorary Chair of the GWAO.

In 2013, the GWAO was honored to receive the National Aeronautic Association’s Public Benefit Flying Award. One of the most prestigious awards for any aviation organization. The citation read at the event stated: *The Greater Washington Aviation Open benefits organizations flying cancer patients, wounded warriors, and educating future aviation leaders while bringing the entire aviation community together,*

“Fore a Great Time...Fore a Great Cause.”



After playing the GAWO at Lansdowne Resort, near Dulles International Airport, since 2006 (nine years), the GAWO Board selected a “new” club, Army-Navy Country Club in Arlington, to host the tournament in 2015. After a multi-million dollar renovation of the golf courses and the construction of a beautiful clubhouse, the GAWO looks forward to hosting the tournament closer to DC at such a wonderful facility for many years to come.

At the 2015 GAWO the proceeds raised and donated by the tournament passed the \$2 million mark. These donations have benefited organizations provided vital services to thousands of people across the country. From the humble beginnings of raising \$7,000 at the 1st Annual GAWO, the tournament has become a foundation of the aviation industry’s charitable legacy. Over the past quarter century, through the many ups and downs of the economy, aviation, and the transition of many aviation leaders through industry and life, the GAWO has remained the premier aviation event, “Fore a Great Time...Fore a Great Cause.”

Greater Washington Aviation Open Charitable Donations

1989	\$7,000	Kentucky Educational Television
1990	\$12,000	Children's National Medical Center
1991	\$13,000	USO
1992	\$20,000	Corporate Angel Network (CAN)
1993	\$30,000	CAN
1994	\$34,000	CAN
1995	\$40,000	CAN
1996	\$44,000	CAN
1997	\$50,000	CAN
1998	\$56,000	CAN
1999	\$65,000	CAN
2000	\$75,000	CAN \$70,000 & EAA Young Eagles \$5,000
2001	\$83,000	CAN
2002	\$101,000	CAN
2003	\$105,000	CAN
2004	\$111,000	CAN
2005	\$115,000	CAN \$112,000 & Tiahart Foundation \$3,000
2006	\$125,000	CAN
2007	\$127,000	CAN
2008	\$140,000	CAN
2009	\$95,000	CAN
2010	\$95,000	CAN
2011	\$104,000	CAN \$84,000 & Veterans Airlift Command (VAC) \$22,000
2012	\$100,000	CAN \$50,000 & VAC \$50,000
2013	\$100,000	CAN \$50,000 & VAC \$50,000
2014	\$90,000	CAN \$45,000 & VAC \$45,000
2015	<u>\$90,000</u>	<u>CAN \$45,000 & VAC \$45,000</u>
	\$2,027,000	CAN \$1,657,000 & VAC \$212,000

Alexandria Scholarship Fund

2009	\$3,000
2010	\$3,000
2011	\$3,000
2012	\$3,000
2013	\$3,000
2014	\$3,000
2015	<u>\$3,000</u>
	\$21,000

Total Charitable Contributions: \$2,048,000

GWAO Honorary Chairs

2015

Rep. Rick Larsen, Ranking Member, House Aviation Subcommittee

2014

Rep. Sam Graves, House Aviation Subcommittee

2013

*Rep. Hal Rogers, Chairman House Appropriations Committee

2012

Jack Potter, CEO, Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority

2011

Robert "Bob" McCarthy, CEO, Marriott

2010

Clay Jones, CEO, Rockwell Collins

2009

Bruce Whitman, CEO, FlightSafety Int'l

2008

Jack Pelton, CEO, Cessna

2007

Pete Bunce, CEO, GAMA

2006

Rep. Joe Knollenberg, Chairman House Appropriations Committee (Transportation)

2005

Rep. Todd Tiahrt, House Aviation Subcommittee

2004

Gov. Robert Ehrlich, Maryland

2003

Rep. Martin Olav Sabo, Chairman House Aviation Subcommittee

2002

Rep. Don Young, Ranking Member House Aviation Subcommittee

2001

Rep. Hal Rogers, Ranking, House Appropriations Committee (Transportation)

2000

Lynne Russell, CNN Headline News

1999

Rep. Jimmy Duncan, Chairman, House Aviation Subcommittee

1998

*Sen. Wendell H. Ford, Chairman, Senate Aviation Subcommittee

1997

Jim McLean, Golf Professional (Doral)

1996

John Feinstein, Author, journalist, and sports commentator

1995

Rep. Jimmy Duncan, Ranking, House Aviation Subcommittee

1993

Rep. Bob Carr, Chairman, House Aviation Subcommittee

1992

Sen. Conrad Burns, Senate Commerce Committee

1991

Rep. William F. Clinger, Jr., Ranking, House Aviation Subcommittee

1990

Rep. James L. Oberstar, Chairman, House Aviation Subcommittee

1989

Sen. Wendell H. Ford, Chairman, Senate Aviation Subcommittee

*Second time serving as Honorary Chair

GWAO Tournament Committee & Board (years of service)

1989

Paul Bollinger, Airport Consultants Council (26)
Pete West, National Business Aircraft Association
Rocky Wilkinson, Air Line Passengers Association (2)
Bill Burhop, Air Transport Association (2)
Rob Wigington, Airport Operators Council International (4)

1990

Jeff Lehman, OBN Aviation/Greeley Pond Technologies (24)

1991

Don Skiados, ALPA

1993

Jon Ash, InterVISTA (21)

1994

Mordechai Lebenberg, K&R Industries (3)
Rachel Trinder, Zuckert, Scoutt & Rasenberger LLC (5)

1995

Ed Pinto, Aviation Daily (6)
Barney Parrella, Airports Council International - NA (2)

1996

Jonathan Gaffney, Metropolitan Washington Aviation Authority (2)

1997 (N/A)

1998

Jim Bennett, MWA (7)

1999

Mary Miller, Signature Flight Support

2000 (N/A)

2001

Ed Hazelwood, Aviation Week

2002 (N/A)

2003 (N/A)

2004

Paul Wiedefeld, Baltimore Washington International Airport (5)

2005

Tom Morr, Greater Washington Initiative (1)

2006 (N/A)

2007

Tim Letzkus, Scribe Strategies & Advisors (6)

2008

Steve Martin, InterVista

John Provenzano, Delta Air Lines

2009 (N/A)

2010 (N/A)

2011

Dick DeiTos, Metropolitan Washington Airline Committee

Lisa Piccione, National Business Aviation Association (3)

Darby Becker, GE Aviation

2012 (N/A)

2013

Michael Robbins, ALPA

2014

Paul Feldman, General Aviation Manufacturers Association

Beth Rossman, Honeywell

2015

Sam Whitehorn, McBee Strategic

John Maloney, The Boeing Company