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A Bald Eagle Soars at The National Conference Center
Rescued eagle is rehabilitated and released to the delight of crowds

LEESBURG, Va., Nov. 12, 2014 — The National Conference Center, one of the largest conference training centers in the country, and West Belmont Place, an events center with a 16,000 sq. ft. ballroom, were hosts to an unusual event last week when a rescued Bald Eagle was released on the property to the delight of about 200 people who came out to see the bird released back into the wild. The National Conference Center and West Belmont Place have received awards for their environmental stewardship of the property and the eagle release highlighted the conference center's commitment to protecting the environment as well as the conference center's beautiful 65-acre campus.

The National Conference Center and West Belmont Place are located just outside of Washington, D.C. and within close proximity to the Potomac River. The eagle was found on 9/11 near to NCC. He was on the ground in a backyard, too weak to fly with vultures around him. The local Loudoun County wildlife specialist was called and they, in turn, contacted Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, one of the largest wildlife veterinary hospitals in the Mid-Atlantic. Belinda Burwell, DVM, executive director and founder of BRWC, brought the eagle to the wildlife center where she found he was suffering from chest trauma and was bleeding in to his lungs. Burwell suspects that he may have been struck by a vehicle.

Once brought to the wildlife center, Burwell and her team knew he was in serious shape when he immediately laid down (eagles never lay down). For the first two weeks, he was kept in a baby playpen and monitored and cared for hourly. As he began to recover, he was moved to the center's flying cage. The cage is built in the round so that large raptors can fly for hours and build up conditioning and wing strength. This eagle is the tenth eagle the center has rescued in the past year.

The National Conference Center has a special relationship with the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center. For years, NCC has hosted an Earth Day celebration for local school children and has partnered with BRWC. The organization has education animals—animals that, due to injury, cannot be released back into the wild. It was particularly great for the school children to be able to walk the stream bed and then meet the animals that were representative of the animals that would live in that habitat.

“When we learned that Blue Ridge Wildlife was looking for a location to release their eagle, we immediately volunteered,” said Geoff Lawson, vice president and general manager at The National Conference Center and West Belmont Place. “With our close proximity to both the Potomac River and the location where the eagle was found, our site was an ideal location for the release. Plus, in addition to helping Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, we wanted to be able to host an event for our local community and our customers. Seeing a bald eagle up close is a rare opportunity.”

The National Conference Center had several organizations staying at the facility that came out to watch the eagle send off.

A representative of the public school system came out and Skyped the event which was seen live by more than 500 school children and CBS This Morning came out and did a story on the release that ran on Veterans Day.

At 8:30 a.m., Geoff Lawson welcomed the crowd that had gathered on the lawn at NCC with some attendees having travelled (driven all night) from as far away as North Carolina and Pennsylvania. Others in attendance were families from the local community, local business people and wildlife enthusiasts, some conference center and West Belmont Place employees and those with companies and organizations holding training meetings at the conference center. “It’s very unusual for someone to attend training sessions and have this type of an event to attend as well,” explained Lawson. “At The National Conference Center, we’re committed to the community and our partnerships as well as our guests and we’re always looking for ways to demonstrate our commitment.”

Burwell removed the eagle from the large crate in the back of her van and walked him around in front of the crowd so everyone could take photos. All the while, the bird nipped at her with his large beak. She explained the importance of the eagle biting at her as part of ensuring that the wild animals the center rehabilitates do not become habituated to humans. After everyone had a good look at the bird and photos were complete, Burwell tossed him up in the air in the direction of the Potomac River and the bird rose above the crowd and flew off. The crowd clapped and then most there wiped their eyes as the eagle recaptured his freedom. It was a very poignant moment to see the eagle soar above. Burwell also wiped her eyes but then hopped in her van to return to the hundreds of other wild animals needing her attention.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Photos available on request. Please contact Vicki Bendure at vicki@bendurepr.com or 540-687-3360 for photos of the eagle and the release.

More about the National Conference Center

Located in Northern Virginia 12 miles from Dulles International Airport and 35 miles from Washington, D.C., the National Conference Center is one of the largest and most comprehensive conference centers in the nation. With 917 guest rooms and over 250,000 square feet of meeting and group function space, including the West Belmont Place catering complex with its 16,500 square foot ballroom, the National Conference has become the Nation’s headquarters for productive meetings and West Belmont Place the hub for Loudoun County and surrounding area social functions. West Belmont Place was named 2013 Best Venue by the International Special Events Society. The National Conference Center is also on the GSA schedule. NCC was recently acquired by NCC PS Enterprises LLC, a venture between PCCP, LLC and Stoneleigh Capital, LLC., which retained LaKota Hotels & Resorts to oversee all aspects of the day-to-day operations. For information call 800-640-2684 or visit www.conferencecenter.com.

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