Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
2017 Governor's Environmental Excellence Award Winners

The 2017 Governor's Environmental Excellence Awards were announced on April 4, 2017 at the 28th Environment Virginia Symposium in Lexington. The awards recognized the significant contributions of environmental and conservation leaders in four categories: sustainability, environmental project, land conservation and implementation of the Virginia Outdoors Plan. They are given to businesses and industrial facilities, not-for-profit organizations, and government agencies.

Piedmont Geriatric Hospital in partnership with Virginia Center for Behavioral Rehabilitation
   Renewable Energy Program Environmental Project – Gold Medal

The Piedmont Geriatric Hospital (PGH) has partnered with the Virginia Center for Behavioral Rehabilitation (VCBR) [and FDC Enterprises] to provide heat to both facilities. The PGH operates a boiler that previously used wood waste, supplemented by fuel oil when wood was no longer sufficient, to produce steam that delivered heat. PGH established a new way to obtain heat by using locally grown herbaceous biomass (native grasses) as a feedstock, in collaboration with FDC Enterprises and the Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech. Before the project was implemented there were years of testing and evaluation of methods for delivering and processing material through the existing feed and boiler systems. The new feedstock consisted of native warm season grasses that provide benefits in water quality protection, wildlife habitat and soil restoration. By reducing the use of fuel oil and switching to the use of the herbaceous biomass, the project supports local farms in Southside Virginia. This has also resulted in an increase in wildlife habitat and a reduction of 5,292 tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as well as 3.67 metric tons of CO2e/acre-year sequestered in soils. This conversion has created a rural economic boost and employment opportunities. The total savings since 2011 has been $540,133 which was the result of reduced fuel oil consumption by 517,296 gallons. The cost of fuel oil is approximately twice as much as the cost of grass biomass needed to produce an equal amount of steam.

This program provides other businesses with an outline for how small facilities can switch to renewable energy in heat delivery systems. Other facilities have reviewed information by PGH to evaluate the possibility of switching to renewable biomass.