

Deerwood Country Club, the last Duval course to host a PGA Tour event, will get a makeover

Deerwood hosted the Greater Jacksonville Open three times in the 1970s, the last time in 1976

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Jacksonville Florida Times-Union

September 29, 2025

Fifty years after the [Deerwood Country Club](#) was the last Duval County golf course to host a PGA Tour event, the Southside course will get its most extensive renovation in its 65-year history.

[Erik Larsen](#), the former project architect for Arnold Palmer who has fingerprints on First Coast courses such as the [Sawgrass Country Club](#), Marsh Landing, Hidden Hills and the Plantation at Ponte Vedra and supervised the makeover of the Selva Marina Country Club into the [Atlantic Beach Country Club](#) and the [St. Johns Country Golf Club](#), will oversee the renovation of Deerwood which will include extensive changes to the back nine and an overhaul of infrastructure such as irrigation, drainage, routing and bunkering.

With this expertise comes an energy that Deerwood General Manager Thayer Kern said is palpable among the membership.



"Listening to Erik gets you energized," Thayer said. "I believe that golf course architects are artists, and he's got this artistic view that everyone can appreciate. He's keeping what's good about the course and pulling in elements and inspirations from around the world. It's really tough being around him and not getting pumped up."

Larsen said he's simply appreciative to have the opportunity to put a combination

of modern ideas and old-school concepts on the original George Cobb design, which was previously renovated in 2004 by Brian Silva.

"I have always liked this golf course and it has terrain you don't always see in North Florida," Larsen said during a recent site visit. "In general, Florida golf courses don't have a lot of up and down. This golf course does. I also feel like it's one of the grand old dames of Jacksonville private clubs, one of the really nice clubs and I'd like to bring some of that elegance back."

The renovation will begin in the fall of 2026 with a reopening planned for the late summer of 2027. [MacCarrach Construction](#) will do the heavy work.

The course will be replanted with Celebration and Tifeagle grass.

Major changes coming on Deerwood's back nine

Larsen said there isn't much re-designing necessary on Deerwood's front nine, which begins with one of the best par-5s on the First Coast.

But starting with the par-4 10th hole, the back will be nearly an entirely new experience.

Larsen is lengthening the hole to a par-5 along the lines of the sixth hole at Bay Hill in Orlando, winding around the pond. Skilled players can cut the corner by going over the water and have a mid-iron to the green.



The 11th hole will remain a drivable par-4 but Larsen will expand the pond on the left to force players to be more accurate with any notions of trying to drive the green.

The par-3 12th hole will stay around 185 yards, but this is when it really gets interesting: Larsen is turning the putting surface into a "Biarritz" green, an old-school feature used in courses by architects such as Seth Raynor and Charles Blair Macdonald.

A Biarritz green has a front, then a drop-off, then an upper tier. Larsen had the same type of green built at No. 2 of the St. Johns Country Golf Club when he renovated it.

That's not all. The 12th green will be shared with the par-4 14th hole, coming from the opposite direction. No. 13 will go from a par-5 to a par-4 and the uphill par-3 15th hole will be shortened a bit, with the green brought down to the edge of a pond, similar, Larsen said, the No. 12 at Augusta National.

Nos. 16, 17 and 18 will remain relatively the same.

Short course is also coming

The other major development will be a short course to the right of the current driving range that will have three greens and six bunkers. But shots between 50 and 70 yards can be attempted into any of the greens from almost any direction, limited only by a golfer's imagination.

Deerwood Director of Golf [Mike Broderick](#) said the short course will be a valuable addition to the facility, suitable for use by beginners and juniors, as well as low-handicap players seeking to hone their short game.

The short-game complex also meshes well with the PGA of America's Operation 36, in which beginners start with 25-yard shots to the green and play from that distance until they can shoot 36 for nine holes — then back up further as they become more skilled.

"It really goes in tandem with Operation 36," Broderick said. "It will drastically improve most people's skills."

The short game area and the range will also be a social hub, with a food and beverage area built and skills challenges during events such as the annual "Deer Hunt."

"We'll have a grill out there, we can have long drive contests, chipping contests, putting games ... all of it right there," Broderick said.

Thayer said the options are nearly unlimited.

"It's growing the game," he said. "It's helping beginners and juniors play golf without feeling intimidated. We can create this fun, interactive area over just a couple of acres."

Although Deerwood from the tips has always been a stern test (the 72-hole record for the seven Greater Jacksonville Opens played at Deerwood is 15-under), the course will be more user-friendly for high-handicap players.

"I think a well-manicured golf course is always easier for every golfer," Broderick said. "But Erik has every player in mind. At the end of the day, it's still going to be a tough golf course but I think it's going to be playable for every caliber, men, women, juniors and seniors."

Project is part of an overall expansion at Deerwood

Deerwood has been humming with activity since April of 2024, part of a \$20 million master plan.

The pool was rebuilt and the fitness center upgraded. Six new Har-Tru tennis courses were added.

The clubhouse was renovated, with family and an "elevated" dining experience at the 1960 restaurant.

Thayer said the club is offering up to 500 executive business memberships for non-residents that can individuals or corporations.

But as with most country clubs, the golf course is the centerpiece, and Larsen's vision will complete the entire picture.

"It's a 20-year-old golf course, if you're dating back to the last renovation," Larsen said. "But it's 65 years old in the bones. We need to bring it back up to speed."



Deerwood's PGA Tour history

Deerwood was a major player in the rotation of courses for the Greater Jacksonville Open, played from 1965 to 1976. The last four GJOs were played at Deerwood before the tournament evolved into [The Players Championship](#) and relocated to the TPC Sawgrass in 1977, coinciding with the PGA Tour establishing Ponte Vedra Beach as its headquarters.

1967: [Dan Sikes](#) became the first Jacksonville native to win a PGA Tour event in his hometown when he shot 9-under 279 to beat Bill Collins by one shot. It would be 21 years before the next Jacksonville native to win on the First Coast, when [Mark McCumber](#) captured The Players.

1968: Tony Jacklin became the first Englishman to win a PGA Tour event when he shot the lowest 72-hole score for a GJO at Deerwood at 15-under 273. He beat Chi Chi Rodriguez, Doug Sanders and DeWitt Weaver by two shots.

1969: Raymond Floyd won the only GJO to go to a sudden-death playoff when he birdied the first extra hole to beat Gardner Dickinson. They both shot 12-under 276.

1973: Jim Colbert posted a 9-under 279 to beat Sikes, Johnny Miller, Jim Weichers and Lou Graham by one shot.

1974: Hubert Green shot 12-under 276 to beat John Mahaffey by three shots.

1975: Larry Zielger topped Mac McLendon and Mike Morley by two shots at 12-under 276.

1976: Green won the GJO for the second time, beating Miller Barber by two shots at 12-under 276.