

Deerwood Country Club unveils ambitious renovation plan for iconic Jacksonville golf course



This is an aerial view of Deerwood Country Club, including the clubhouse.

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By Stuart Korfhage – Managing Editor, Jacksonville Business Journal

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- Deerwood Country Club announces complete course renovation starting October 2026.
- Architect Erik Larsen plans major changes, including a 20,000-square-foot double green.
- Short par-3 course will open in 2026 before full renovation.

For golf architect Erik Larsen, renovating one of Jacksonville's iconic golf courses is about the balance of keeping the elements that made it great while adding just enough innovation and creativity to make golfers do a double take.

That is Larsen's goal with his latest project: renovating the Deerwood Country Club course. And he has the plan to get it done.

Deerwood announced that a complete overhaul of the course will begin in October 2026 with the expectation that it will be completed in about 12 months.

When it's done, Larsen expects people to be talking about it.

"What's needed immediately is the wow factor," Larsen told the Business Journal. "I think the wow factor here will come from the design changes we'll do at the golf course."

That design will be brought to life by local firm MacCurrach Golf Construction.

Larsen plans lush green turf and stunningly white sand in the bunkers. His design includes major changes for holes 10, 11, 12 and 14, with the most eye-catching alteration a 20,000-square-foot double green shared by holes 12 (par-3) and 14 (par-4).

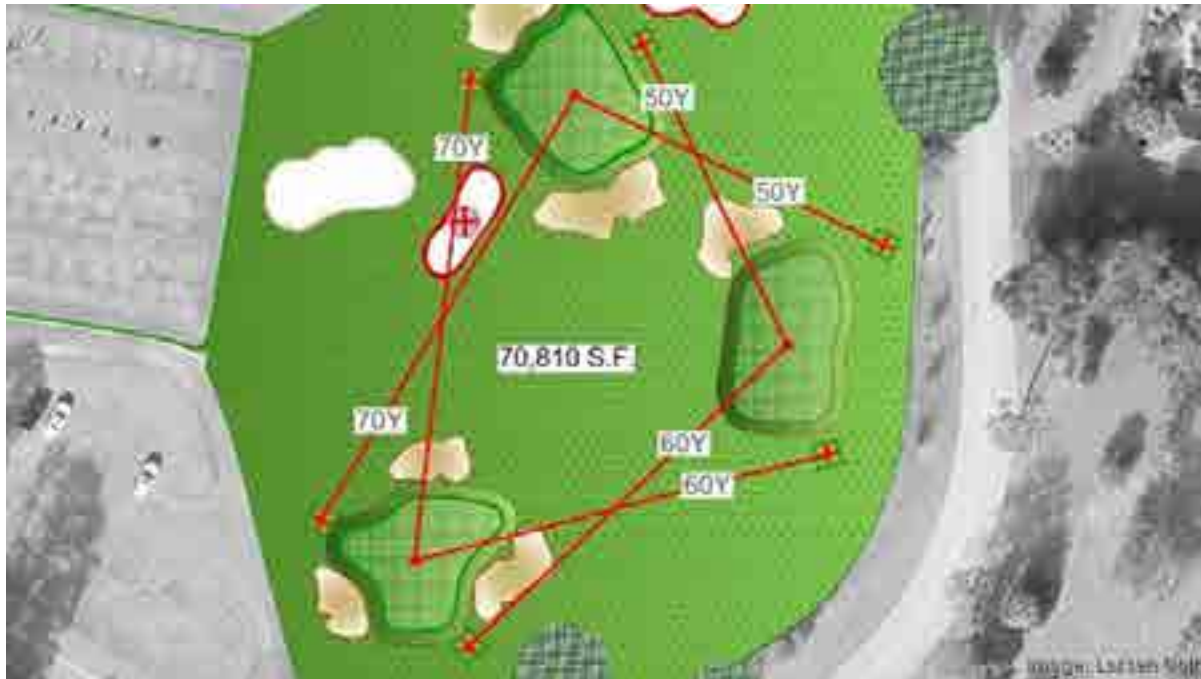
The 12th hole will also incorporate a Biarritz-style green, featuring a pronounced swale or trough through its center. According to a statement, this design concept was introduced to American golf more than a century ago by renowned architect C.B. Macdonald.

"That's the wow factor for the regulation golf course," Larsen said.

The 10th hole will become a risk-reward par-5 that wraps all the way around the existing lake, and the 11th hole will be a short par-4 that will be drivable for some players. In all, it will be a "challenging" 7,350 yards.

Outside of the main course will be a short par-3 course in the driving range area. The six-hole short course will be constructed and open in 2026, prior to the full-course renovation.

Larsen says that type of novelty course is the biggest innovation in golf right now. It not only allows golfers to sneak in a few swings when they don't have time to play a full round, but it also appeals to non-golfers — or at least infrequent ones — in a manner similar to what Topgolf and its competitors do.



This is a design of the par-3 course at Deerwood Country Club called “The Approach” presented by the Eiras Family.

"It will be a smash," Larsen said. "It's so much fun for non-golfers, for after-round events, for evening, off-peak hours. It's what's trending in golf now.

"If clubs, facilities are doing major renovations and don't include this fun golf, small golf, component, they have missed an opportunity."

As for the less glamorous aspects of the renovation that keep players coming back, Larsen plans new irrigation and drainage systems and regrassing. He said after about two years when the new turf really settles in, the course should be able to promise consistently pristine conditions.

"I would hope that we come away with a super elegant, formal-looking, perfectly maintained (course)," Larsen said.

Deerwood is a massive course at about 187 acres and has been a standout in the area since opening in 1960. The course was originally designed by prolific golf architect George Cobb, who also served as a consultant for Augusta National Golf Club in the 1950s and 1960s.

Its history includes playing host to the PGA Tour's Greater Jacksonville Open, which later became The Players Championship, seven times between 1967 and 1975.

"I think that this course has more expectation (than others he's worked on)," Larsen said. "It's been here a long time. It's played the JGO. It's got a super loyal membership."



This is an aerial view of Deerwood Country Club.

Taking care of the members and making it more attractive to prospective ones were among the reasons to embark on the project.

It's the final phase of a multimillion-dollar initiative aimed at enhancing the overall member experience at the historic private club.

Since 2022, the club has introduced a range of enhancements, including a resort-style aquatic center, an upgraded fitness and wellness complex, new pickleball courts and extensive improvements throughout the clubhouse. Among the highlights is "1960," a new family dining room named in honor of the club's founding year, along with updated locker room facilities and other modern amenities.

General Manager C. Thayer Kern said there are about 500 equity members of the country club, which does allow membership to those who live outside of the Deerwood community. With the upgrades already made and the investment planned, the club is poised for growth at all levels of membership.

"As we continue to elevate the club in all facets, the redesign will be visually stunning and provide a best-in-class golf experience for the membership and adds to the existing

momentum the club is experiencing from a facilities and membership services standpoint," Kern said in the release.

In another addition, the club started a partnership with golf instructor Travis Fulton, enhancing the club's instructional program led by Director of Golf Mike Broderick.

Consistently recognized by Golf Digest as one of the nation's top golf trainers, Fulton brings a wealth of experience. As part of the new partnership, members now enjoy exclusive access to Fulton's state-of-the-art indoor golf studios located in Ponte Vedra Beach and downtown Jacksonville.

Kern noted that Deerwood was fortunate to work with a designer with Larsen's résumé. He has designed more than 100 golf courses throughout the world over a 40-year career. His local contributions include the redesign of Atlantic Beach Country Club, which received a Best New Course rating from Golf Digest in 2014.

More recently, he worked on the redesign of St. Johns Golf Club near St. Augustine.

He was Arnold Palmer's project architect at the Arnold Palmer Design Company from 1983-2011.

Based in Ponte Vedra, Larsen said he's had many opportunities to play Deerwood and wants to see a course built that will please many people he calls friends.

"The challenge to me is personal," he said. "I love this place. I love the people here."