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## Starting a New Century of Change at Greensboro Country Club

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# Starting a New Century of Change at Greensboro Country Club

As it pays proper homage to its first 100 years, the North Carolina club is also taking exciting steps for its future.

By Joanna DeChellis, Managing Editor

The oldest private country club in Greensboro, N.C. is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. But as members have planned a proper celebration to look back at where the club has come from and all that it's accomplished in its first century, they've also taken time to peer ahead.

Greensboro CC has adapted to emerging trends throughout its history—such as in 1969, when it merged its original Irving Park campus, near downtown Greensboro, with Carlson Farm Country Club, which is located closer to the edge of town, to stay in step with shifting office and residential patterns. The golf course and club property acquired through the merger are now known, respectively, as The Farm Course and The Farm Club at Greensboro Country Club.

The club adapted again in 2003 when, at the request of members, it renovated its Irving Park dining room to include a casual bar and dining terrace with a view.

But even with these changes, as the economy began to slump in 2007, membership numbers and revenues were still poised to decline. Greensboro CC's members decided another hard look was needed, to determine how to keep the club at the forefront of the region's changing social and recreational needs.

In that year, an ambitious new plan emerged for a \$5 million renovation and expansion of the Irving Park property, plus another \$6 million to completely renovate the 45-year-old Farm Course. Cash reserves and any new initiation fees would cover the cost of all projects. And so far, the results speak for themselves.

"We forecast a loss of about 100 members [in 2009]," says Rachel Payne Morrow, Director of Marketing. "But there was only a net loss of seven; we've held at right around 1,500 total members."

## A Rock Amid Shifting Tides

Through all of these strategic adjustments, Greensboro CC has been able to sustain the critical balance—maintaining a high level of sophistication within an unmistakably family-friendly atmosphere—that often proves elusive in private-club settings. Much of this stems from the continuity provided by strong leadership, deep management bench strength, and a consistent, long-term vision shared by the individuals who have guided the club's improvement over the last decade. The linchpin of that consistency has been Earl Anderson, Greensboro's General Manager and Chief Operating Officer, who came to the club in 1995 after 20 years as General Manager at Cape Fear CC in Wilmington, N.C.

An \$11 million renovation begun two years ago has helped Greensboro CC, with 1,500 members, minimize attrition and maintain a competitive edge.



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Even before the arrival of her second child, Director of Fitness Sara Waggoner could expect to meet new people every day, thanks to the surging popularity of Greensboro CC's expanded fitness offer.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREENSBORO CC

## Greensboro CC AT A GLANCE

- Location: Greensboro, N.C.
- Founded: 1909
- Members: 1,500
- Irving Park Clubhouse: 55,000 sq. ft.
- Farm Club Clubhouse: 28,000 sq. ft.
- Fitness Center: 13,700 sq. ft.
- Annual Golf Rounds: 40,000 (Irving Park, 22,000; The Farm Course, 18,000)
- General Manager/COO: Earl Anderson
- Assistant General Manager: Scott Ripley, CCM
- Director of Golf: Jim Deaton
- Director of Greens and Grounds: Doug Lowe
- Golf Course Superintendent (Irving Park): Brooks Turner
- Golf Course Superintendent (The Farm Course): Wes Proctor
- Executive Chef: Scott Pisulua
- Director of Fitness: Sara Waggoner
- Director of Marketing: Rachel Payne Morrow
- Director of Catering: Scott Harmon
- Assistant Club Manager: Melissa Clark

Greensboro CC was much quieter when he arrived 14 years ago, says Anderson. There were 36 holes of golf, two swimming pools, a tennis program, a brand new—but very small—fitness center, a fine-dining operation and a casual grill. Members were primarily textile executives, and golf was the main draw.

Then, in 2003, the Greensboro economy went through a period of transition and adjustment. “The textile, apparel, and furniture industries were all being severely challenged,” says Anderson. “A lot of people were out of work, and new industries started to emerge.”

With that change came new members—and a different set of expectations that needed to be built into the club's strategic planning process.

“The existing club was a good one, but there was a lot of room for improvement, given the trends we saw in the future,” says Anderson. “Plus, if we wanted to be competitive, we needed to evolve with our members' needs and wants.”

These competitive pressures were heightened by a spate of improvements being made at other private clubs in the Greensboro market that included a \$3 million renovation to the golf course at Sedgefield Country Club, a new indoor tennis and fitness center at Starmount Country Club, and \$5 million in clubhouse and golf course renovations at Cardinal Golf and Country Club.

“For us to become more effective and useful to our members, we simply asked them what they wanted us to do to improve,” says Anderson. The results of a membership survey provided a crystal-clear to-do list, he reports, with three things standing out clearly at the top: “An improved men's locker room, a bigger fitness center, and a better golf course at The Farm.”

### Fitness at the Forefront

Taking on such extensive tasks amid the uncertainties of shifting local and national economies might have been daunting to many clubs. But under Anderson's leadership, the Greensboro staff kept a proactive focus on the positive outcomes that all of the new projects could provide.

“If you can add value to the member experience by improving amenities that are fun and convenient, like fitness, swimming, and tennis, you'll not only set yourself apart from your competition, you'll also get to interact with





your members every single day," says Anderson in describing the attitude that's prevailed during all of the changes.

There is now a swimming facility at each of the Greensboro CC properties. At the Irving Park campus, the pool has shallow areas for younger swimmers, a separate toddler pool, and plenty of lounge space for families to relax and enjoy the sunny weather. Meanwhile, the pool at The Farm Club is used primarily for the Greensboro CC swim team, which has quickly become one of the strongest in the area.

Greensboro CC also enjoys a very active tennis program, with eight tennis courts and a tennis pro shop at Irving Park, and three indoor and three outdoor courts at The Farm Club. "Our program accommodates all levels of ability from social to competitive, with our biggest emphasis on junior development," says Tom Cascarano, Director of Tennis.

Fitness, however, has historically been Greensboro CC's weakest link.

"When I came to the club in 2002, the membership was much older and the fitness center was geared more toward that demographic," says Sara Wagganer, Director of Fitness. To make the club's fitness offerings more all-inclusive, she im-



The driving range at the club's original Irving Park campus provides a welcomed recreational respite at a location that is close to downtown Greensboro.

mediately overhauled the program.

"I added classes like pilates, boot camps, weight-training and yoga," she says. "We were beginning to offer certain classes in multiple time slots, just to meet the demand. We hired more personal trainers and group fitness instructors, and we started hosting health fairs and other wellness classes."

As the program improved, Wagganer noticed that members who had previously exercised at local gyms were now choosing to instead break a sweat at Greensboro CC.

"We had real problems with space," she reports. "We had nowhere to hold our fitness classes, so we used the pavil-

ion. The fitness center was so cramped, members were climbing over each other to get on the cardio equipment."

Enough was enough. In 2007, Greensboro CC broke ground on a 10,300-sq. ft. expansion to its Irving Park tennis and fitness center. Opened in June, the new fitness complex includes a front desk area, a new women's locker room, separate cardio and strength training rooms, two group exercise rooms, two massage rooms, and a new women's locker room.

"We doubled our cardio equipment, ordering five new treadmills, four new ellipticals, and eight new bikes," says Wagganer. "We also have a seated elliptical and a rower, and we'll get new strength-training equipment in the spring."

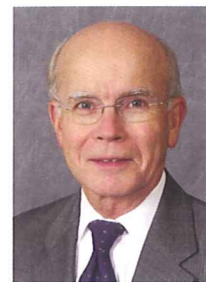
"As we were looking at equipment to purchase, it was important to find machines that were smooth and user-friendly," she adds. "They needed to be easily adjustable for the older members and still challenging for the younger set. We also wanted them to look good."

Today, Greensboro's fitness center offers a friendly and casual atmosphere where classes and individualized instruction are geared to meet each member's personal fitness goals. Under the direction of certified, degreed and highly experienced instructors, options range from cycle and circuit training classes to stretch, yoga, and water aerobics. Personal training is also available.

"Every day I see at least ten new members that I don't know in the fitness center," says Wagganer. "I'm trying to learn their names as fast as I can!"

Across the way from the fitness center, in the main part of the Irving Park clubhouse, the men's locker room is now brightly lit and lined with new wood lockers. Tiled floors, leather couches, plasma TVs, raised ceilings and "luxury rain" showerheads all speak as well to

## C&RB CLUB FEATURE



General Manager/COO Earl Anderson (left) has presided over a series of major changes at Greensboro CC since arriving in 1985. A dining room renovation and new menus from Executive Chef Scott Pisulua (right) have helped to sustain a steady pace of annual growth in F&B revenues.



how Greensboro CC has left no detail unattended in satisfying the first two wants on its members' latest wish list.

### Transforming The Farm

At the same time, to address wish number three, an even bigger transformation—and one that the club's golfing contingent is eagerly anticipating—has been taking place at The Farm Club.

"The membership wanted to improve the golf course," says Anderson. "The [United States Golf Association] told us that our greens were susceptible to disease, and that it was only a matter of time before we'd have much bigger problems on our hands."

The club had made few changes to The Farm property, which is located 10 miles from the center of Greensboro and was once home to a dairy farm, since acquiring it in 1969.

"The Ellis Maples-designed course was built in an era when architects didn't have much in the way of earth-moving equipment," notes Doug Lowe, Greensboro CC's Director of Greens and Grounds. "That quickly became obvious

to the golfers who walked its many hills and valleys."

After meeting with several architects in 2008, the club hired British course architect Donald Steel to bring the Farm Course into the 21st century. And unlike Greensboro's city course—a Donald Ross design that's hemmed in by the surrounding Irving Park neighborhood—the Farm had room to grow.

"Steel did a great job utilizing what we had on the property," says Lowe of the renovated course, which is set to reopen in May of 2010. "Five holes will be new, and several more are being reshaped to bring water into play or to heighten the course's many beautiful vistas."

The new design will add nearly 400 yards and a stroke to par (it will now be a 7,302-yard, par-72 course). But it isn't being rebuilt strictly for the big hitters. Each hole will have at least five different tee boxes, and some will have six.

"Greensboro County Club's mission is to provide the finest facilities to all of its members," says Anderson. "The Farm Course was one of the last pieces of the pie, and members are really excited and

proud about the new layout."

"We knew we couldn't just sit there with a 45-year-old golf course," Davy Davidson, the club's current President, said earlier this year in a local newspaper article. "We want this club to be about many things to many different people, but our primary focus is golf. And if you're going to be in the golf business, you must have a premiere course."

While The Farm Course won't reopen officially until Greensboro's 101st year, it's already come far enough to be part of the centennial celebration. A special coffee-table book is being prepared to mark the club's 100th birthday, and later this month, renowned golf photographer Joann Dost will shoot images of the new Farm Course for the commemorative volume.

Those photos will then serve as just the latest example of how Greensboro CC always makes sure to focus on where it's going, at the same time it takes justified pride in where it's been. **C&RB**

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## Staying Power

EVEN WHILE COMPLETING the latest round of improvement and expansion projects at its two properties, and tending to the details of its Centennial Celebration—with planned activities for this fall including fitness contests and events; a tennis exhibition and gala; a swim team reunion; an anniversary golf tournament, and a black-tie Centennial gala—the Greensboro CC staff is making sure to stay ready to tend to members' next wave of needs and wants.

"We try to come up with new ideas all the time, and our bar is pretty high in terms of moving forward with them," says General Manager/COO Earl Anderson. "We need to keep current and competitive."

The club is currently seeking to further sharpen its focus on the future through specific projects that include improving The Farm clubhouse and surrounding facilities; adding more indoor tennis courts; building up its special events and dining business (view menus at [www.clubandresortbusiness.com](http://www.clubandresortbusiness.com)), and creating more family-oriented programs.

"The club business is not easy," Greensboro's current President, Davy Davidson, said in a local newspaper article published earlier this year about the changes taking place at the club. "People have a lot of choices with their time and money, including not joining at all. We're very confident the changes we've made here will position us for the next 100 years."



The Farm Club (left) and Farm Course (above), both acquired through a 1969 merger, figure prominently in the picture as Greensboro CC moves forward with its long-range strategic plans.