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*The spectacular reopening
of Greensboro CC's Farm Course*

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Redesigned Greensboro CC Farm Course exceeds expectations

By STEVE HANF

GREENSBORO – More than 300,000 cubic yards of dirt got moved in the new layout.

Some 1,300 sprinkler heads went in for a new irrigation system.

Rolls of lush sod measuring 24 acres on the fairways and 125 acres in all went down.

A winding 5.3 miles of pristine concrete cart paths crisscrossed the scene.

Amazing numbers, all. But what those figures really add up to is one thing: a fabulous layout and spectacular experience for golfers at Greensboro Country Club's Farm Course.

"This is a gorgeous piece of property," said Jim Deaton, the club's director of golf. "We knew with some changes we would make it better, but we didn't even expect what we got."

Perhaps that's because, as course architect Donald Steel put it in a release from the club, "Such has been the scale of the transformation at the Farm Course that members may not recognize it."

The 100-year anniversary of Greensboro Country Club became even

more special as members flocked to the Farm Course following its Nov. 14 grand opening. The original Carlson Farms Country Club layout, designed by Ellis Maples, was done on a shoestring budget, explained Deaton: "He did a great job with what he had."

Carlson Farms and Greensboro Country Club merged in 1969, giving GCC both its in-town Irving Park facility and the Farm Course on the northwest side for years of enjoyment, but changes to the Farm Course had been looming since early this decade. The greens were 40 years old, the bunkers and tees needed work, grass in the fairways had turned into a mixed bag.

"If we need to do all that, let's get an architect in here and do it right," Deaton said of the initial thinking. "Certainly there was some caution. Our board exercised extreme diligence in coming to this present course. We had a lot of great architects very interested in this project."

Steel won out, bringing with him 44 years of experience. The Scottish architect, best known for his work with links-style courses and for having advised every course in the United Kingdom to

host the Open Championship, started in on his fifth project in America after earning rave reviews for his design at Primland Resort in southern Virginia.

At the Farm Course, Steel got to rework an existing layout, but with the exciting twist of having more land – not less – with which to work. The layout used to be a par-71 covering 6,914 yards from the back tees, with a course rating of 73.8 and slope rating of 134. Now, it sits at par-72 and measures 7,302 yards with a rating of 75.1 and slope of 140 from the green tees.

"The thing Donald Steel did was recognize this design had to be playable by all levels of golfers," Deaton said. "We didn't want to have the hardest golf course. But if we want to set it up to challenge some of the better players around, we can do that. We're so pleased that Donald was able to come up with a blend; that the golf course can be played by any style of golfer."

Among the changes made by Medalist Golf Inc. were a few surprises, such as the inclusion of Zeon zoysiagrass in the fairways and on the tees instead of the bermuda strains normally used in

this area. Deaton said golfers will love the zoysia because the ball sits up for a better playing surface, and the course should look better, as well: The zoysia comes out of dormancy sooner, stays green longer and uses less water. The greens consist of A1/A4 bentgrass, the rough and surrounds are 419 bermuda and the fescue areas mostly contain fine fescue.

Course superintendent Doug Lowe now oversees an almost entirely new golf course. Steel flipped the front nine and back nine, setting up a finish just behind the clubhouse that Deaton called "dramatic" for tournament competition. The new 18 is a 588-yard par-5 that used to be a par-4.

The new starting hole got one of the most drastic changes in the redesign. The old No. 10 used to have a large hill between the drive zone and green, but some 15 feet of that hill came off for the new No. 1 and now the par-4 offers a lake view that wasn't there before.

Some of the dirt was used at No. 2, a 539-yard par-5 that had a severe slope

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Photo by Robert Ross

Carlson Farms' par-3 eighth, the former 17th, has a new look with the tee moved some 40 yards to the left.



The layout of the par-3 third hole – formerly No. 12 – is basically the same, but every every green on the course has a different shape than before.

Photo by Robert Ross

Carlson Farm *Cont. from pg. 10*

between the drive zone and second shot that could cause trouble on the fairway and even make for a precarious ride down the path.

The par-3 third and par-4 fourth holes remain fairly similar – although every green on the course has a different shape than before – while Nos. 5 and 6 are brand new. The fifth is a 161-yard par-3 leading to one of Deaton's favorite holes, the 463-yard sixth that doglegs right and "will be a strong test for every caliber of player," Deaton said. "It's not the hardest hole, but consistently will offer that stonewall where a player has to hit two good shots."

The par-5 seventh, measuring 526 yards from the back tees, remains much the same. The par-3 eighth, however, saw big changes with the green moved some 40 yards left to allow the lake to be dug

out more for irrigation purposes. In addition to the hole being stretched some 25 yards to 227 yards, the scenery from the tee is dramatically better with a view of the lake.

"Downhill shot to the water, the setting with trees, azaleas blooming in the spring around the green," Deaton said of the 8th hole. "You might get there and not want to hit a ball."

At No. 9, a new back tee adds length to the par-4, 436-yarder along a reshaped fairway. The 10th hole got a drastic makeover, stretching 604 yards with water between the drive zone and second shot. The 11th remains a similar par-4 at 424 yards and leads into the new stretch of Nos. 12, 13 and 14.

The par-4 12th replaces the old No. 4 and features a drive zone lowered some 8-9 feet in elevation. The 466-yarder ends near the old practice area along Horse

Pen Creek Road, and Deaton called the end result "exceptional." The 13th hole is a 549-yard par-5 with a huge evergreen looming behind the green, and No. 14 is a 184-yard par-3 set on the water with a scenic shot of trees in the background.

The 15th hole, a 411-yard par-4, saw a valley between the tee and drive zone filled and softened, while the 16th green was shifted away from Carlson Dairy Road, lengthening the par-4 hole by some 50 yards to 451. The 17th green also was moved about 30 yards to the right, stretching the par-3's distance to 194 yards.

And speaking of stretched, the new practice tee area measures 80 yards wide by 60 deep, and the range runs some 400 yards.

Members have spent the past year walking the paths and checking out the improvements, and Deaton said the highest praise has come for the layout's

diverse par-3s. The Farm Course is unique enough as is with five par-3s and five par-5s – par is 35 on the front side and 37 on the back – but the fact that each par-3 offers a different challenge is a plus.

"On the old par-3s you could come out and hit the same club on every one," Deaton said. "Now, a highly skilled player could be using everything from a 7-iron to a 3-wood."

The Club's membership – some 1,200 strong currently, said Deaton – isn't the only group taking notice of the changes to the Farm Course. In 2010, the USGA Senior Open qualifier already has been scheduled along with the Monday qualifier for the PGA Tour's Wyndham Championship. In 2011, the Club will host the North Carolina Amateur.

"That kind of early recognition is very pleasing," Deaton said.