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The 120-acre golf course at the Naperville Country Club is closed for renovation until June 2007. The course will be longer, and the face-lift will also eliminate dangerous blind spots.

Danielle Gardner / Staff photographer

Bringing a golf course up to par

Naperville Country Club hasn't had a major renovation of its fairways, greens and bunkers since it was established in 1921. That's all changing, and it's going to cost \$7 million.

By Meg DeLoiph
BUSINESS EDITOR

Local dutifers have their choice of golf courses - 46 in DuPage County, according to county statistics - when they're deciding where to swing a club. That's why the Naperville Country Club, which hasn't had a major golf course renovation since its establishment in 1921, decided it was important to be competitive.

"You always have to continue to improve it," said Jim Friz, club president. "Our primary asset is the golf course, so the focus was let's improve the course, and what's the best way to improve the course?" The country club is in the mid-

dle of a \$7 million project, which includes renovation of the 18-hole course and adds 80 parking spaces. There will be a new halfway house - which provides refreshments and restrooms for golfers - and improvements to the course's maintenance facilities and infrastructure, such as its irrigation system.

Some work was inevitable, because aspects of the course's infrastructure would have had to have been replaced in the next five years anyway, said former club president Joe Sommers.

"The question becomes, if you're going to spend lots of money on the infrastructure, why not do it right and make the improvements on our schedule," he said.

The renovated course - designed by Steve Forrest, a principal with the golf course architecture firm, Arthur Hills/Steve Forrest and Associates - re-routes some of the holes to better align with the contours of the land, Sommers said.

"The trend has been to increase the length of the golf course," Sommers said. "Ball technology has changed."

The renovations also will address some safety problems of the old course. Some of the holes were awkward, with blind spots that made it hard for golfers to see where they were hitting the ball, said member Jennifer Rehn, who is part of the project committee.

Club members started planning the renovations about four years ago, but they didn't seriously discuss them until May 2005, Friz said.

The 240 voting members approved the plan, and work began in the middle of the summer, shortly after a golfing season that typically runs from late April to the end of October.

The club is paying for the project through a \$131 monthly fee paid by members that Friz likened to a mortgage payment. The club made arrangements with nearby golf courses to accommodate its members while the construction is underway.

The members held an auction to

offset the construction costs - although the auction turned out to make more fun than funds. They sold off memorabilia from the old course, as well as chances to be among the first golfers on the new course.

Construction is expected to be finished in mid-June 2007, but the first foursome is already set.

"Traditionally, the first round of golf is played on a new course by the president of the club, the golf course architect, the club's head pro and the course builder," Sommers said. "We have a project manager, so we'll add him."

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