

Return on investment

One of southeast Florida's premier residential communities has completed a project to redesign its three nines of golf.

Michael McCarthy is approaching 20 years as CEO of Addison Reserve Country Club in Delray Beach, Florida, and attributes its success to two primary factors: culture and capital investment.

When he took on the role in 2007, his focus was on the former: "We had to rebuild our culture first," he says. "We built it on people. To elevate the membership experience, we elevated

the quality of the staff, and really developed the relationships between our team and members."

McCarthy knew his market; a prerequisite of membership is ownership of a home within one of the 19 villages that comprise Addison Reserve. He sought to make the club more welcoming, and a true focal point for the community. This included relaxing the dress code and creating

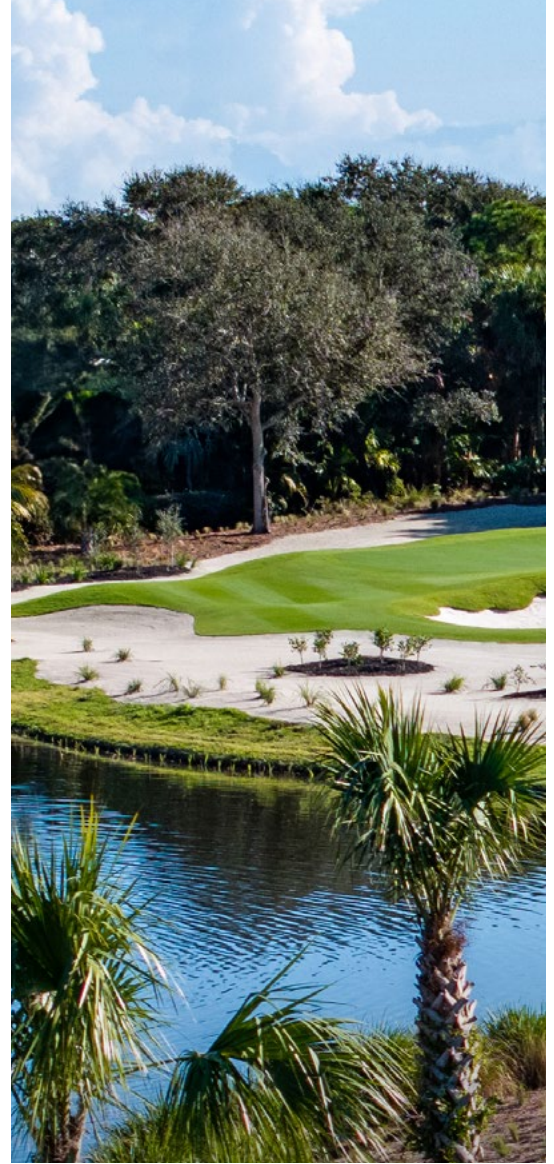


Photo: Gideon Heller

The closing hole of the Salvation nine at Addison Reserve is a par-five to a green surrounded by water



Photo: Gideon Heller

On the par-three seventh on the Salvation nine, the green and surrounds form an island in the sand

an environment where members and staff feel comfortable on first-name terms. “We got better at what we did on a daily basis – the blocking and tackling,” he says.

As his work began to yield results, the challenge then became one of coping with increasing demand: “Every day that we got better, the more members wanted to participate,” says McCarthy. His “simple solution” was to invest. “We built a 40,000 square foot lifestyle complex, a 300-seat casual restaurant, full spa and two-storey fitness centre with tennis.”

Three months after the lifestyle complex was completed, Covid hit. But McCarthy has navigated recessions before, and felt confident the club would prosper. With people avoiding gathering indoors, he took the opportunity to

renovate the entire clubhouse. Once that was complete, everything at Addison Reserve was new and state-of-the-art, except the golf courses. “I have wanted to get my hands on them for a long time,” says McCarthy.

Addison Reserve has three nines – Redemption, Salvation and Trepidation – that were designed by Arthur Hills and built in the late 1990s. “We had 25-year-old infrastructure that was failing,” says McCarthy. “I knew that I wanted to hire the best in the world to come and redo golf here at Addison and bring golf to the level of all of the amenities that we are offering.”

Among several architects to visit were Rees Jones and his associate Steve Weisser, who toured the club facilities with McCarthy, before being shown around the course by director of golf

course maintenance Joshua Fleisher and director of golf Kevin Baldizar. “After that, Rees said, ‘I understand – it’s not at the level of everything else you have created in the community. But we can make this really special’. He also said, ‘you’ve got plenty of land to work with out there’. I didn’t hear that from anyone else, so it was refreshing.”

Jones and Weisser set about creating a modern course, influenced by classic design principles. “We had 27 holes and wanted a common theme but at the same time a distinctive challenge for every hole – and I think we have accomplished that,” says Jones.

The redesign emphasises the ground game; every green can be accessed with a running shot, while new contour introduces challenge on fairways and around greens. “The original golf



Photo: Gideon Heller

On the third hole of the Redemption nine, truckloads of fill were used to raise the level of the hole and take a building out of view

course was built with enough fill on the holes, so we didn't have to dig any additional lakes out. We just shaped what was there to balance how we wanted it to play with making sure water moved off the holes efficiently," explains Weisser.

Fill was, however, required for one hole, as McCarthy explains: "We have an old sales centre behind the green of the third hole on the Redemption nine that we had renovated into a medical building. I couldn't stand looking at it from the middle of the fairway, particularly as we don't really have any homes in view on that hole. One day I was on my travels and sent a picture from hole eight at Jupiter Hills, and asked, 'can we build a mountain to cover up that sales centre?'"

After some calculations relating to the cost of truckloads of earth, the decision was made – "We now have our mountain!" says McCarthy.

Greens have been designed to provide options to vary play. "They are quite

large, about 6,500 square feet on average, and are made up of several flatter areas with transitions between them," says Jones. "It maintains the interest because you have a different challenge every time you move the pin."

Bunkering was completely rethought too: "The bunkers were very flat and it was sometimes hard to recall which hole you were on," says Weisser. "The challenge with a place that people play all the time is to name any of the 27 holes and immediately be able to visualise it. It was fun to do and Michael pushed us; every hole had to be better, and not just better than it was before. And every single homeowner has an opinion about what they are seeing – so we looked at every little detail, from visuals to how you play it and how to maintain it."

"Rees and Steve also wanted all three ninth holes to be unique," says McCarthy. "The par-four ninth on Trepidation doesn't have any bunkers but is a monster of a hole; on Salvation's

par-five ninth you have to carry water twice; and nine on Redemption is a short par-four where a cascading stream wraps around the green."

The project comprised two phases; with the Trepidation nine and the renovation of practice facilities completed in 2023, and the Redemption and Salvation nines in 2024. The design team also incorporated teeing areas that allow every hole to be played as a par three.

"I don't think I have had one member ask me what the final cost was, because they are so happy." Says McCarthy. "When I arrived, this club was doing \$15 million a year in business, now it's over \$50 million. The community was worth \$600 million and is now worth over \$2 billion. My gut tells me that we'll be sitting here a year from now and home values will be up 20 per cent because of what Rees and Steve have done. That's \$400 million. I don't care what we paid these guys – it was a bargain." **GCA**