

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The restoration of Coral Ridge Country Club is a true family affair.

By Mark Pazdur, Publisher

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA: Rees Jones is an American golf icon and liked by everyone who meets him. He has designed or redesigned more than 230 golf courses in his career, including seven U.S. Open venues earning him the moniker "The Open Doctor."

I traveled to South Florida to eyewitness his restoration of Coral Ridge Country Club, designed by his father, Robert Trent Jones Sr., in 1954.

After graduating the Harvard School of Design in 1964, Rees joined his parents in the golf course architecture business. "Growing up I thought I would be in the industry. I was probably programmed by being around my father," recalled Rees. "The best idea I ever had was to go out on my own at the age of 33. There is no shortcut to experience."

A FAMILY LEGACY

"Coral Ridge Country Club is the only golf course within the city of Fort Lauderdale," said Rees. "In some way it's a part of the community. I grew up at the club and have been 'handed the baton' to modernize a golf course that I know like the back of my hand.



Our 48th Year

EXECUTIVE GOLFER®

America's only national magazine published exclusively for private country club executive golfers

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EDITORIAL/MANAGEMENT

Theda Ahern Pazdur
ART DIRECTOR
theda@executivegolfermagazine.com

Joyce Stevens
EMERITUS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
joyce@executivegolfermagazine.com

Monica Toth
EDITOR
monica@monicatoth.net

June Graham
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
june@executivegolfermagazine.com

JoAnn Pazdur
June Marian
Joyce Arnetta
Eleanor Edwards
Rich Stevens
Taylor JoAnn
Nikki Taylor
Kate Lauren
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

ADVERTISING OFFICES

Mark E. Pazdur
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

10 Dunlin Lane
Aliso Viejo, California 92656
PH: (949) 933-6478

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Our 48th Year

PAZDUR PUBLISHING

10 Dunlin Lane
Aliso Viejo, California 92656
PH: (949) 933-6478

WEBSITE: EXECUTIVEGOLFERMAGAZINE.COM

AUGUST 2020 VOL. 48 NUMBER 330

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The Publisher's Page

“MY RESTORATION OF CORAL RIDGE COUNTRY CLUB ALLOWED ME TO MAKE MY DAD LOOK GOOD AGAIN.”

— REES JONES



“My dad’s accomplishments as a golf course designer are well known, but it’s noteworthy that Coral Ridge was the first course to be owned 100 percent by our family. When Dad was traveling on a design project, Mom would run the day-to-day operations.

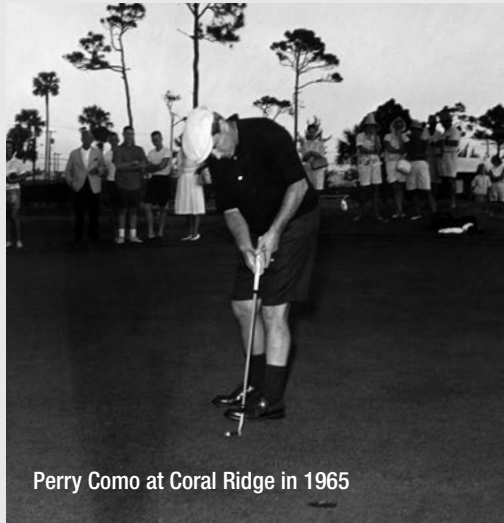
“The club has been a fabric of my life since I was 12,” continued Rees. “I distinctly remember the day before a bulldozer started grading the surrounding land, a bank robbery occurred downtown. Not long after the first pass of brush clearing, the bulldozer abruptly scrapped a hard metal object. It turned out to be the unopened safe from the bank! I imagine we upset a couple of bandits when authorities arrived to retrieve the bounty. As a kid, I found it amusing and if Instagram existed at the time, it would have been a prominent post on my story timeline.

“As my team started the renovation process, I knew the importance of preserving the essence of what Coral Ridge stood for. Celebrities, athletes, and locals have appreciated for years what had been created on a flat coastal plain centrally located to just about every amenity and service South Florida is known for. It wasn’t uncommon to see the likes of Joe Namath [Broadway Joe] or Whitey Ford [The Chairman of the Board] enjoying a day on the course. My dad always touted the course as an ‘easy bogey, but a hard par’ due to the undulating greens that were precisely bunkered with traditional runway-style tee boxes that offered an array of course lengths.

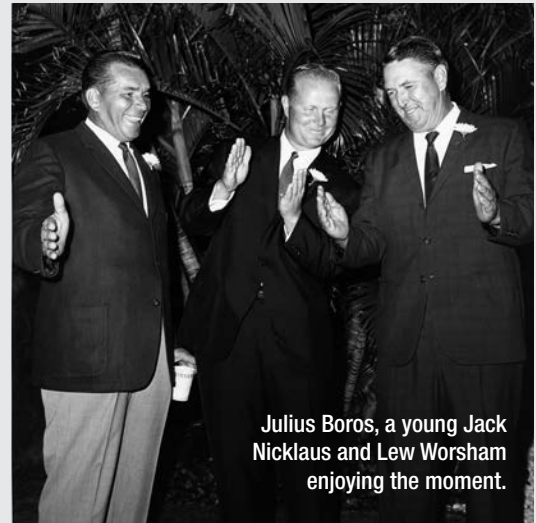
“My goal was to enhance and restore, not replace the masterful green contours and approach shot challenges. Today’s construction techniques allowed me to improve irrigation and ‘lift up’ fairways and green complexes to improve drainage.” ➤



Robert Trent Jones



Perry Como at Coral Ridge in 1965



Julius Boros, a young Jack Nicklaus and Lew Worsham enjoying the moment.

When Coral Ridge Country Club opened in 1954, its 5th hole boasted the longest tee box in the world, at 200 yards. Through adjustment of tee markers and pin positions, it could be played 350 different ways, allowing for a different shot every day of the year.

PRESERVING A LEGENDARY CLUB

When Rees's parents passed, Rees and his brother Bobby decided to sell the prestigious club, with an even more prestigious address, to a partnership with deep roots in the community. A team of local businessmen, attorneys, and entrepreneurs led by Phil Smith, owner of multiple auto dealerships, saw the potential of Coral Ridge. Their investment in what is considered by many as the "crown jewel" of Fort Lauderdale insured its future for generations to come.

"We were formulating plans when the area was walloped by a one/two punch of hurricanes Katrina, then

Wilma, in 2005," painfully recalled J.J. Sehlke, managing partner. "Our partnership's conservative fiscal discipline saved the day. We have always held the belief that you don't build unless you have the cash in hand. If you over-extend yourself, debt can quickly handcuff you and force decisions you don't want to make."

Hurricane repairs allowed the partnership to complete a series of upgrades, including developing adjacent fallow land that bordered the club into a par-3 course designed by Rees Jones. After completing the design, Rees wrote a letter to the partnership group inquiring if there was an interest in a redesign of its championship course. "Wheels started turning on the idea," said J.J. "Our discussion turned to the benefits of a *renovation* or *restoration*. We didn't want to ignore the club's significant history, so a *restoration* seemed best."

The \$9 million capital project is entering the home stretch with completion before the start of season. "The project was completed on time and, more importantly, without the club incurring debt," concluded J.J. "Best of all, we stayed true to the original vision of Robert Trent Jones and his quote 'there will be no weaknesses, they all will be great holes' still rings true." ■



The Coral Ridge Country Club clubhouse features distinctive mid-century modern architecture with panoramic views of the golf course and pool pavilion.

For membership information on Coral Ridge Country Club, please visit CoralRidgeCC.com.