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Golf course architect Michael Beebe, right, describes changes at the Ocala Golf Club, known as the Muni, during a tour Thursday.

Golfers get glimpse of new Muni

"This is a really good piece of property to work with," course architect says of city-owned Ocala Golf Club.

By Susan Latham Carr
Staff writer

Kent Priess lives three blocks from the Ocala Golf Club and has been watching with interest renovations being made to the city's golf course off East Silver Springs Boulevard.

"I have three prospective golfers with me," Priess said Thursday afternoon. He and his three children, Colby, 12; Katie, 9; and Connor, 6; had joined a free tour led by golf course architect Michael Beebe, who explained the changes being made to the municipal course.

"It's going to be beautiful,"

Priess said. "Before, there were such small tee areas. They were chewed up. By mid-summer, you didn't have a place to tee off."

The city is spending \$1.3 million for the construction work to refurbish the course, which was built in the early 1920s. The new irrigation system is expected to cost \$388,000, plus an additional \$75,000 to upgrade the pump station.

The city contracted with the Palm Coast company, Beebe & Associates, a golf course design, renovation and development consulting firm, to give the

course a face-lift.

"This is really a good piece of property to work with," Beebe said. "This property has elevation changes, trees and good soils. All those things make a great golf course. There were not many of the challenges you might face on a Florida golf course."

The Priess family was among the roughly 35 people who showed up to walk the course with Beebe under Thursday's hot afternoon sun.

"There's a lot of detail work that goes in, a lot of hand work, contractor work," Beebe told the participants. "It's all about strategy, creating angles."

At the 11th tee, a par 3, Beebe

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Armando Santa Maria, right, and Carlo Castro Rosa install drainage pipes Thursday under a bunker on the 10th hole at the Ocala Golf Club. The renovation of the city-owned course on East Silver Springs Boulevard, often called the Muni, is expected to be completed in October.

MUNI: Renovation on schedule; weather a concern

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pointed out that the hole is shorter now and made reference to the two bunkers to the right and one bunker to the left.

"We're excited about giving you a lot more tees."

Beebe added tees to attract young or inexperienced golfers and keep them interested in the game. Shorter tees give less experienced golfers an opportunity to play the game, rather than becoming frustrated because it is too difficult.

"We're putting in more short grass around the greens," Beebe said at the 12th hole, adding that a golfer could putt or use a wedge.

At the 13th hole, Beebe said there are now four sets of tees and he added a fairway bunker, which will give golfers a target.

Jason Regan of the Valley Crest Maintenance Company the city hired to run the course, is superintendent at the Ocala Golf Club, commonly referred to as "Muni."

"They are laying over 1 million square feet of sod," Regan said.

He pointed out some of the changes at the 14th hole.

"They dug this pond out and took the old liner out of it," Regan said. "They took all the rocks out from the front of the green and now it's going to be grass down to the edge of the

pond."

At the 15th hole, Beebe said there now are six tees there.

Regan said that, instead of a straight hole, it will play like a dog-leg to the right.

"You get a different perspective, a different angle," Regan said.

Powell Dingler, former chairman of the city's golf board, said the changes are "fantastic." His only concern is whether the course will be open for the Doug Oswald Golf Tournament Oct. 24-25.

Beebe said construction is on schedule, but the weather will determine the completion date. Heavy rains or hurricanes could cause delays.

As the tour moved to the 16th green, Beebe said he moved the green "a little bit to the right."

Regan said even after the course opens, it will take about two years for the course to mature. He said 10 weeks to grow the greens is acceptable if the weather conditions are good.

Maxine Lindquist, who played the course three or four times a week, is reserving her thoughts about the changes.

"Until you play it, you never know," Lindquist said.

Jon Williams, who played the course four to six times a week, said he thinks the course will be a challenge the first few

times it is played.

"It will give you a couple of shots you are not used to seeing," Williams said. "It's going to come down to what the greens are like."

For Beebe, the challenge in renovating Ocala Golf Club is the same as at most other courses.

"People love their golf course," Beebe said. "You have to be delicate and careful and convince them you are going to take care of the golf course."

Beebe will conduct another walking tour at the course, 3130 E. Silver Springs Blvd., at 4 p.m. July 24.

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