

Palm Coast Firestorm



Timber harvesters race against the clock to harvest and salvage trees damaged beyond natural healing during the firestorm of Florida's East Coast. Many man hours will be spent evaluating and tagging damaged trees for harvest or removal for safety reasons. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Fourth of July Fire Storm

The final insult from the El Niño phenomenon that dominated our winter and spring weather patterns was a 90-day drought that led to ravaging wildfires when lightning sparked 70 to 100 brush fires in June as sporadic rains returned. Brevard, Volusia and Flagler counties were hardest hit as the fires, fanned by high winds, became uncontrollable over the fourth of July holiday.

A tour of the area, one week after the fires were extinguished, revealed that several courses sustained damage to the woods adjacent to the course, but Matanzas Woods GC in Palm Coast suffered the most, losing a couple of tractors and mowers and a rain shelter on the course. They also sustained some damage to the clubhouse. The course will remain closed until repairs are made.

It was interesting to note that the superintendents at all three courses made every attempt to protect the course and the equipment under their charge, except when under official evacuation orders. They all agreed that the controlling factor in the movement and intensity of the fires was the wind speed and direction. Narrow strips or fingers of burned areas could be seen showing the routes the fires took

to access various areas and leave others alone.

Mike Fabrizio, director of golf course maintenance, was overwhelmed by the fury and intensity of the fire storm that destroyed nearly 50 homes in the surrounding area.

"I thought we might be able to help control the fire with our irrigation and the open spaces to act as fire breaks, but we lost the electricity to the pumps from the fire and there was no stopping that monster as it roared through." The dense pine woods that surrounded the homes and golf holes and the high winds were a deadly combination.

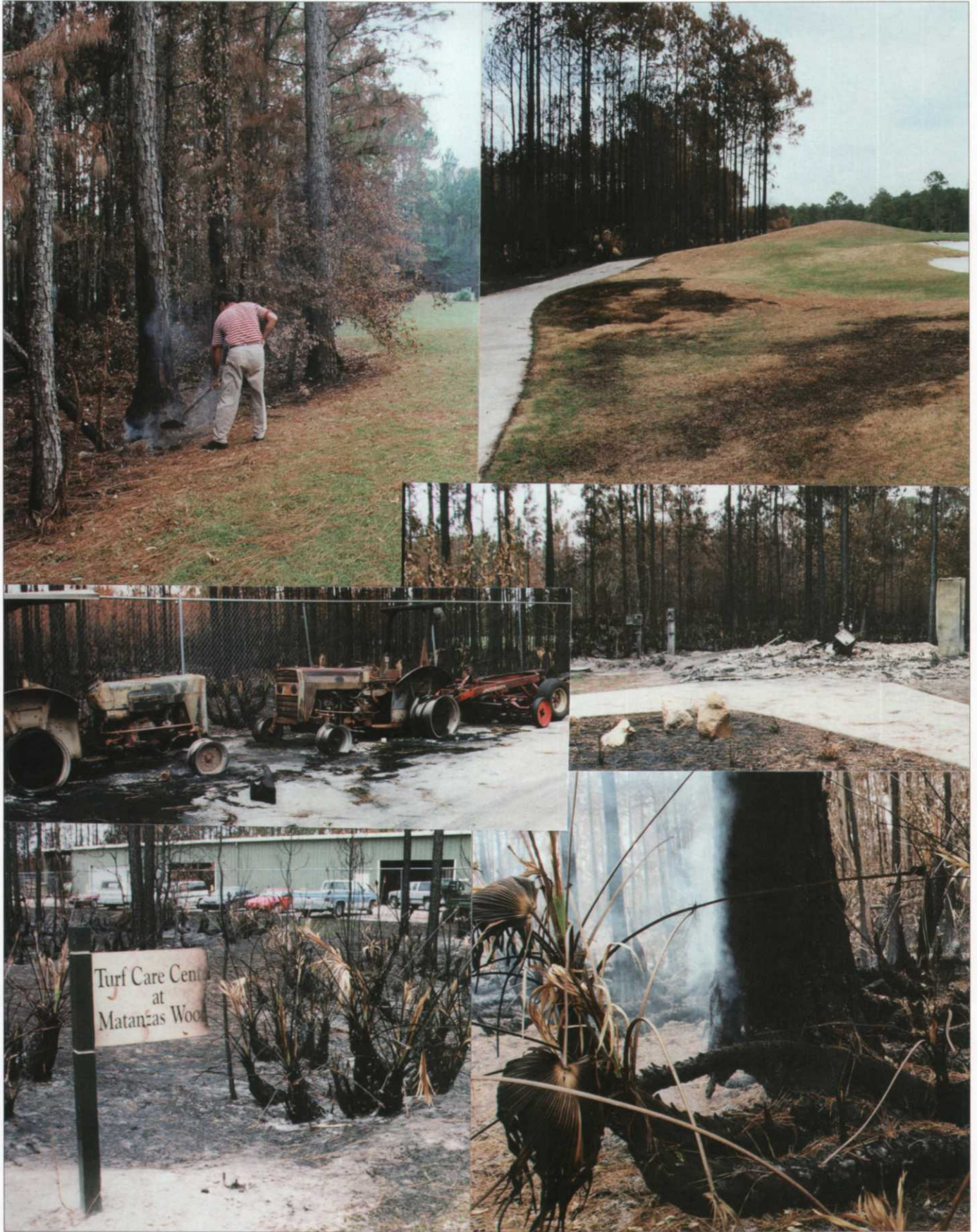
Scott Bessette at the LPGA International GC in Daytona Beach said that northwest winds had the fire bearing down on the LPGA headquarters and the Indigo Lakes development a little farther to the east. Both properties were under mandatory evacuation orders. However, the firefighters were able to establish a line of defense using the LPGA course and control the fire. Scott was allowed back in

and he was able to use the irrigation on the south course to help preserve some of the surrounds of the greens and tees.

Bobby Gonzalez at River Bend GC in Ormond Beach watched the fire detour around a large open field and then try to move down the rough of his fourth hole. Fortunately firefighters were able to cut a fire break and stall the fire before much of the woods was damaged. Here are some of scenes one week after the fire storm.



Matanzas Woods superintendent Andy Maguire (left) and Mike Fabrizio, CGCS, director of golf course maintenance and construction for the Palm Coast Resort smile for the camera, but have been spending long hours getting the course back in shape. Photo by Joel Jackson.





Scott Bessette, superintendent of the LPGA International Golf Course spent the night with fire fighters as they used the golf course as a line of defense to get the fire in their area under control. Photo by Joel Jackson.



In Ormond Beach, Riverbend superintendent Bobby Gonzalez is standing by a fire break cut by fire fighters that stopped a fire after only minor damage to the rough along the 4th hole. Photo by Joel Jackson.



One week after the woods along the LPGA fairways were totally devastated, six to eight inch tall wiregrass clumps can be seen rising from the ashes as Mother Nature atones for her fury. Photo by Joel Jackson.



Blowing in from the northwest, wildfires came within 20 yards of the LPGA headquarters building with lots of LPGA historical memorabilia. Photo by Joel Jackson.