Houston courses struggle to recover from monster storm
By JOEL JOYNER
HOUSTON — Randy Dayton could scarcely believe his eyes on Saturday morning, June 9, when he gazed upon the devastation wrought by Tropical Storm Allison. Much of his golf course was under water.
The Houston area got three feet of rainfall from Allison before it moved northeast. Weather experts calculate that the storm dumped enough rain to supply the nation’s water needs for an entire year.
Dayton was in his seventh week as superintendent at Northgate Country Club here when the monster storm struck. “We got hit Friday night,” he said, “and by Saturday morning everything was flooded. We’re not certain what our total rainfall was — our gauge overflowed.”
Dayton’s Northgate facility sits along Cypress Creek. “When I stand on the course and look down at this creek, it normally sits 30 feet below in a canyon,” he said. “It’s hard to believe it came up over the banks. The water rose so quickly.”
Allison has now been pegged as the most costly tropical storm in U.S. history. At least 50 deaths are blamed on the tempest.

Eagles dare at Colorado’s Aspen Glen
By JOEL JOYNER
CARBONDALE, Colo. — The private Aspen Glen Golf Club, set in a spectacular Rocky Mountain region near Glenwood Springs, takes uncommon pride in its roosting bald eagles and two trout-spawning channels.
Now it’s got the official credential to prove its environmental zeal — certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System. It’s the 15th course in Colorado to win the coveted designation.
Every year, anywhere from one to three bald eagles visit Aspen Glen. The club, opened in 1997, has a “protection zone” around a nest that has been at the site since the 1940s.
“Eagles reside seasonally on this prominent 150-foot ponderosa pine that’s adjacent to our 10th fairway,” said superintendent Richard Eide. “Whenever an eagle is present, we shut down the hole.”

Maintenance firms: superintendents’ friend or foe?
By JOEL JOYNER
CALABASAS, Calif. — Are maintenance companies big bad corporations that run roughshod over superintendents as they gobble up contracts? Or are they a relief to courses in need of professional care? Surprisingly, the companies and superintendents tend to agree.
“Superintendents are our friends,” said Terry McGuire, Environmental Golf’s director of business development. “We’re made up of superintendents. We’re not the bad guys. We’re not the management company by type cast. We want to be the most superintendents friendly company in the business.”

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Friend or foe?
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There is an evaluation period in every contract written when the company wishes to employ the existing maintenance staff. "Some superintendents may not want to work for an outsourcing company," he said. "We also need that time to determine if we need to supplement the staff or, hopefully not, replace them.

"Typically, our agreements are to take over the total maintenance operations of a golf course," McGuire said. "That's everything from cutting the grass and planting the flowers to maintaining the equipment. We're aggressively marketing this year to set up as the superintendent-of-choice company."

OUTSOURCING GROWING

Only a small number of courses are maintained by outside companies, but the business is growing rapidly. International Golf Maintenance, already with 80 contracts, expects to hit 100 by the end of the year.

"There seems to be an acceptance of outsourcing in the golf course maintenance field," said Greg Plotner, vice president of Florida operations for IGM. "We're not the type of company that comes in and cuts salaries or replaces staff with lesser paid people just to meet the bottom line."

Newly recruited superintendents may expect certain procedures to be followed. "If there's a superintendent already at the course, and the owner is happy and we're happy with the course conditioning, then we want the employee to stay on at the club," Plotner said.

"If they can accept the concept of transition and working with a management company, then we'd give them some on-site training and review any programs they have in place," he added.

INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

IGM also provides other incentives to encourage company growth and superintendent recruitment. "We have an internship program as well as a management-trainee program that we're constantly developing," said Plotner. "We're always looking to recruit students from technical universities and turf schools."

IGM has recently secured agreements in Florida with the Sabal Point Country Club in Longwood, Winter Springs Golf Club in Winter Springs, the Pionciana Golf & Racquet Resort and the Boggy Creek Racquet Resort, near Orlando.

SERVISCAPE SYSTEM

ServiScape currently has nine contracts, with the Harborside International course in Chicago as one of their recent acquisitions. "We started off by meeting with the greens committee and board of directors," said Max Barrick, vice president of marketing and sales. "They wanted to keep all their staff, so we hired them all and started rolling.

"That's the way we work," he said. "You want to hire the existing people, obviously training them in our system and methods. The existing staff already knows the idiosyncrasies of the property - where the hot spots are, what burns up first, and disease areas."

Team management plays an important role in continued growth. "We take new recruits through an orientation program detailing our methodology," Barrick said. "Then there's an ongoing training program where we bring our superintendents together on a monthly basis to discuss common problems and solutions."

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