

His words are cryptic. His tone is stark. I just finished reading an e-mail from Peter Carew, a long-time golf course superintendent, who oversees two 18-hole municipal courses in New Orleans.

"I still can't believe this situation," Carew writes of the storm-ravaged city.

One of the courses that Carew oversees, Joseph Bartholomew Municipal Golf Course, is not far from a levee that breached on a canal when Hurricane Katrina roared through the city. The course was wiped out.

Carew says his "once-nice" maintenance facility was under nearly 15 feet of water for three weeks and was transformed into a toxic pool — a hazardous concoction of fertilizer, chemicals and salt water-corroded equipment. "I had to wear my chemical mask just to look inside [it]," he says.

When the flood waters receded, Carew was staggered by what he saw on the course. Massive 80-year-old oak trees on the course were uprooted by Katrina's 125-mile-an-hour winds. Tee boxes and fairways that had been recently renovated were ruined. Overturned cars, deposited by raging flood waters, dotted the sides of fairways.

Everything — trees, bushes and grass — was dead. "I am just lost for words," Carew wrote.

Carew's e-mail, which I received unexpectedly in early October, left me at a loss for words. But then I noticed the title that Carew had given the e-mail's subject line: "Hopefully New Orleans one day again!"

Despite the despondence of his overall message, I detected a tinge of optimism expressed by Carew from his e-mail's title.

Several days later I spoke with Carew on the phone about the status of his city, his profession and his life. Carew sounded as upbeat as one could be for the circumstances.

Carew's house was damaged but not destroyed, so he has a place to call home. He also still has a job. In October, Carew's assignment was to get the first nine holes of the 18-hole Brechtel Municipal Golf Course, the other course he manages, in condition for play by Dec. 1. Brechtel

A 'Ray of Hope' in New Orleans

BY LARRY AYLWARD



THE REOPENING
OF BRECHTEL
MUNICIPAL GOLF
COURSE IS A GAIN,
ALBEIT SMALL, IN
A CITY THAT HAS
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received much wind damage but was spared the terrible flooding that besieged Bartholomew.

Carew's plight makes me think of Brooke Cooley, the general manager of SunnyBreeze Golf Club in Arcadia, Fla., whose course was wiped out by Hurricane Charley in August 2004. Not many people can empathize with Carew, but Cooley can. She felt the same desperation and anguish as Carew does now after experiencing what Mother Nature did to her town, not to mention her livelihood.

"It was a life-changing experience," Cooley says.

Having been there, Cooley has advice about how to endure after your life has been turned upside down by a hurricane or other natural disaster. Her message is not as compelling as it is straightforward and real.

Life will get better, she assures. Time *will* help heal.

Cooley advises those whose lives and professions have been stricken by natural disasters to seek out their loved ones for support. And just as important, offer support to people who need it. Help each other, whether it's lending a hand to help a friend clean up his house or a shoulder for that person to cry on.

"Support systems are needed," Cooley says. "They are vital."

It's also essential to try and regain some kind of normalcy in your life, Cooley states. That may mean getting back to work on the golf course as soon as possible, even if it's only cleaning up tree branches and debris.

It will take time for things to get back to normal, if they ever do. It could take several months and even years.

And the time will go slowly. So it will take patience — patience you probably never thought you could muster — to endure.

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Cooley and her family, including her husband, Robert, who is superintendent of the course, just recently moved back into their home, more than a year after Charley struck. They had been living in a trailer that was parked in their wrecked home's driveway.

At the golf course, which lost seven buildings and 600 trees, SunnyBreeze's employees were still operating out of temporary facilities in October. Play is down significantly, but people *are* playing.

"We made it through, and we're getting there," Cooley says in an upbeat tone.

Someday, Cooley believes "things" will be better than they were before Charley struck.

"It's like our house," she says.

"Living in a trailer in our driveway was not the ideal situation. But now

Carew is humble enough to know that his course's survival is miniscule in the grand scheme of things, what with people losing their lives, their loves ones and their homes.

we're back in our house and everything is brand new and the way we want it."

Cooley pauses.

"But it takes a while to get there," she says. "And it takes a lot out of you."

In October, six weeks after Hurricane Katrina had struck the Gulf Coast, Carew was unsure of his fate. But he was sure of one thing when I spoke to him. While he had no supplies, a tiny crew and limited equipment, he wanted badly to get Brechtel back up and running.

Carew admitted that he searched his soul and asked himself what was the point of going through with it. His city was in ruins and he was worried about a golf course. But he had a quick and candid answer for himself that gave him strength.

"I'm a superintendent," Carew told himself. "And I've been one for so long that making it work is just part of the game."

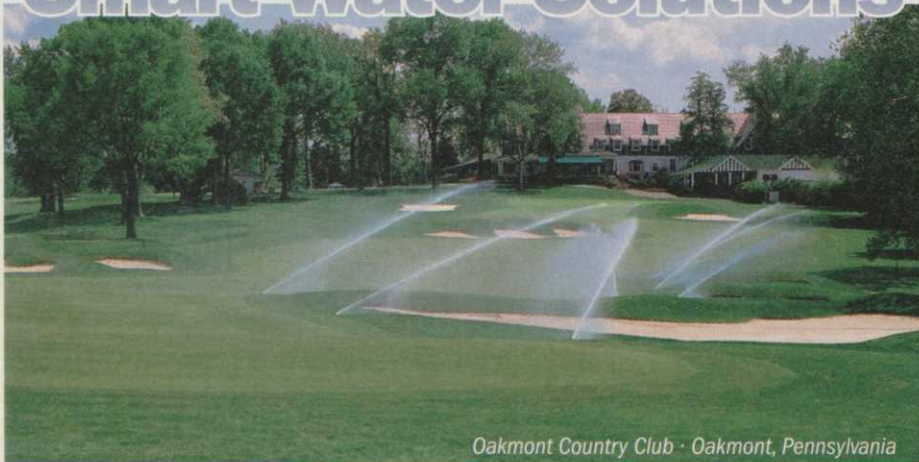
Carew is humble enough to know that his course's survival is miniscule in the grand scheme of things, what with people losing their lives, their loves ones and their homes.

But at least the course's reopening is a triumph, albeit small, in a city that has lost so much.

"It's a ray of hope," Carew says.

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