



PHOTO COURTESY APMG

A virtually undamaged boat was deposited in the palms to the right of #13 fairway, Deering Bay CC.  
See Page 36 for story on Deering Bay.

## *South Florida golf courses endure, recover*

# Storm over land

BY LARRY KIEFFER

**N**othing can withstand the forces of nature. No matter how well built the structure, how deeply rooted the tree or firmly padded the pumping station, somewhere there's a hurricane, tornado, earthquake or flood that can take it out in a flash.

Man at his finest is no physical match for the raw power of nature.

By the same token, no force of nature can dominate the human spirit. No matter how devastating the physical blow, man's incredible will to survive will make him crawl out from the debris, pick himself up and dust himself off.

And start all over again.

By an exponential factor, Hurricane Andrew was the greatest natural disaster in this nation's history. Early damage estimates of \$10 billion have since proven to be far too low. The final cost will never be calculated.

Impact of the storm on Florida's golf industry is difficult to



Falcon Fairways GC at Homestead Air Force Base, an 18-hole course for military personnel, was the only course permanently closed as a result of Hurricane Andrew.

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DWIGHT MELGAARD,  
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## *from a Hurricane Andrew nightmare*

assess. Many of the most badly damaged courses are private and private golf clubs don't discuss expenses in public. Period.

Of the 42 courses responding to the FGCSA survey, loss estimates ranged from a few thousand dollars to more than a million. Most of the expense was for cleanup. Ranking second was tree replacement. A handful of courses experienced heavy structural damage — maintenance facilities and equipment, clubhouses and irrigation systems were the principal victims.

It is difficult to extrapolate an overall estimate from the survey responses because the questions were not phrased precisely enough (by Janlark Communications) to force comparable data. Still, we would be safe in putting the total cost to south Florida golf courses in the neighborhood of \$30 million, possibly much more if you throw in personal losses by golf course employees.

We could find only one golf course that has been closed as a result of the storm — and that one only because it no longer has a client base. Homestead Air Force Base has been leveled and its personnel shipped to other installations. The base golf course is

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A 40-ton crane is used to lift a fallen oak tree at Don Shula's Hotel and Golf Club, Miami Lakes.

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## *Except for those most badly damaged, most courses were back in operation within a week*

not damaged beyond repair, however, and sources say it could be renovated if a golf course is appropriate for the site once its new use is determined. Although we could not confirm it directly, several South Florida superintendents said they understood the greens at Homestead AFB are being watered enough to keep them viable.

Other courses in or near the path of Andrew's eye—Redlands, Keys Gate, Card Sound, Kendall and Palmetto — have reopened.

Except for those most badly damaged, most courses were back in operation within a week — some within two days. Palmetto was closed for 70 days, Riviera CC in Coral Gables for nearly a month. Card Sound, at the northern end of Key Largo, reopened in three weeks. "We weren't really ready to open," notes Card Sound's Lee VanValkenburg, "but it was important to re-direct the crew's focus on why we were there in the first place."

Andrew's punch was felt all the way over on the west coast. Hibiscus GC in Naples was closed for 15 days to clean up more than 500 fallen trees and repair damage to 30 sprinkler heads, 22 irrigation control boxes and 10,000 feet of water lines.

Tree damage was the universal experience along Andrew's

path. The typical course reported more than 500 trees uprooted — Doral had 2,100 — and perhaps 200 more so badly damaged that they had to be cut all the way back.

Surprisingly few trees were lost, however. Most were set back up, trimmed, restaked and were thriving by mid-December, when this report was written.

"Nearly all the trees we lost were 'garbage' trees — exotics that we were glad to be rid of," wrote one superintendent.

To a certain extent, cleanup costs were inversely related to the length of time the course was closed. Some course managers opted to clear debris as quickly as possible to minimize loss of revenue or inconvenience to members. Others elected to clean up with fewer people over a longer period of time. In those cases, loss of income was not reported as part of the cleanup cost.

"The key to saving money on cleanup was timing," says Steve Kuhn, superintendent of Doral Resort. "The earlier you contracted help, the better. A few days after the storm, it cost \$170 to have a ficus tree uprighted. Now (mid-December) the price starts at \$700."

Kuhn also saved money by subcontracting all the cleanup work himself.

"The problem with a turnkey operation is that a lot things get

## Even three months after the storm, transportation is still difficult

lost," he said. "The general contractor will concentrate on one thing at a time, whereas we could work on several projects simultaneously."

Card Sound's VanValkenburg, who also is responsible for the two Ocean Reef courses, found the experience he gained from Hurricane David a decade ago when he was at John's Island Club invaluable.

"I learned that you can't do it one hole at a time," he reports. "First you have to clear off all the greens, then the tees and fairways, getting all the debris into a few big piles before hauling it off."

It may be inefficient to clean up one hole at a time but it's easy to clean up 90 holes at once... if you have 130 workers at your disposal, as did Kuhn.

"We gave each worker a golf cart and responsibility for one hole during the first phase of the cleanup," he reports. "Each worker drove back and forth across his fairway, dragging everything into the roughs. We had the courses cleared by Wednesday, the fairways mowed by Thursday and we were open Friday. Once we got the debris into the roughs, we burned nearly 70 percent of it before the county decided to pull all burning permits."

Kuhn also noted that Doral will not purchase a single replacement tree, even though he lost about 900. "Our property is so big that we can move trees around to where we need them," he says.

While downed trees were the most visible problems that superintendents had to deal with, their real difficulties centered on communication, transportation, staff morale and power.

According to VanValkenburg, one of the most valuable commodities after the storm was a spare tire.

"It was impossible to drive very far without picking up nails in your tires during those first weeks," he reports. "I gave my spare tire to one of my crew so he could get back and forth to work but I soon regretted not having a spare myself."

Even three months after the storm, transportation is still difficult.

"It's hard to get sand or fill because all the trucks are tied up hauling debris," says Doral's Kuhn. "Right now (early December), I need about 180 loads of sand to get the Blue course ready for the (PGA Tour's) Doral Ryder Open. At this time last year, I had 40 loads a day rolling in. The best I can do now is six loads a day."

VanValkenburg had a unique problem. His three courses are irrigated with desalinated water from a reverse osmosis plant that requires as much electric power as his irrigation pumps.

"We were finally able to get a big generator, but it wasn't big enough to run both the R-O plant and the irrigation system, so first we made water and put it into the reservoir and then we switched the generator over to the pumps so we could flush the system and then get water on the greens. We were without water for about seven days."

Almost universally, superintendents said planning and taking care of their crews were the two keys to successful recovery.

"We had to get our people housed and fed," said

VanValkenburg, whose workers all lived in Homestead and lost everything. The hotel at Ocean Reef housed employees and their families while Card Sound found apartments for its homeless employees and underwrote the additional costs.

"I evacuated Key Largo to the mainland and rode out the storm in Homestead," recalls VanValkenburg, noting the irony of having "escaped" to ground zero. "The only good thing I can say about that experience is that I can totally relate to what my crew and their families went through."

Doral also housed its employees and their families, some in hotel rooms and others in hastily converted banquet rooms.

"The hotel was full at the time of the storm and as the guests left, relief workers took their place, but we found room for all the employees who needed shelter," Kuhn says.

Most superintendents marveled at the resilience of their crews.

"The 26 maintenance and pro shop employees suffered about \$2.2 million in damage to their homes and personal property, yet they all worked additional hours," wrote Carlos McKeon, superintendent of Palmetto GC.

"If ever a bunch of people had true grit, it was my crew," said Rick Hill, superintendent at Kendall GC.

Not even the forces of nature can dominate the human spirit.



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The pro shop at Falcon Fairways GC at Homestead Air Force Base, above, was left in terrible shape by Hurricane Andrew. Below, Miami Palmetto Golf Course shows how firm a golf ball was lodged in a palm tree. How it was put there, by a golfer or the hurricane, is unknown.

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DWIGHT MELGAARD,  
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