

## Cleaning up after Andrew –

# Faith, hope and most of all —time

BY SCOTT WAHLIN

**‘In all, we had 500 trees down with another 250 requiring work.’**

**S**tatement issued by the National Weather Service at 2:30 p.m.: *Extremely dangerous Hurricane Andrew heading for southeast Florida... Andrew continues to strengthen with maximum sustained winds of 150 mph... all residents in the hurricane warning area must take immediate precautions to protect life and property... please listen to the people who are trying to save your lives. At the present time Hurricane Andrew has wind speeds and a minimum central pressure comparable to the Great 1926 and 1928 Hurricanes that hit Miami and Palm Beach killing hundreds...*

Living and working through Hurricane Andrew was far more traumatic than I had anticipated. Four days after the storm I realized that hard work alone was not going to heal the psychological wounds experienced by everyone in this community. Faith, hope, and — most of all — time, would be required.

At Don Shula’s Hotel and Golf Club in Miami Lakes, we have a checklist of what is to be done prior to hurricane season, what to do in the event of a hurricane warning and how cleanup work is to be prioritized. We meet annually to discuss and revise these checklists.

Expectations are made perfectly clear in this meeting. I require assistants and mechanics to help in preparation and cleanup. This includes putting up shutters at the hotels and store fronts.

My goal is to let everyone go early enough to prepare their own homes.

Andrew came so fast that this was not entirely possible. My wife and kids put up the shutters at my house. We started preparing the golf courses at 5 a.m. and finished putting up shutters at 9:45 p.m. with only short breaks.

It is important to inventory the chemicals, fuels and oils immediately before a major storm. If an environmental cleanup is necessary, the inventory

will help make sure you get it all. Photographs of equipment, tools and offices may be helpful for insurance claims.

My family and I stayed in the resort’s hotel the night of the storm. I may have considered staying in my house for a hurricane prior to this experience but not anymore.

I checked the golf courses at 8 a.m. after the storm passed. It would be impossible to capture the essence of what I saw with a photograph:

Eighty-foot trees were ripped from the ground with their roots intact. Stands of tall Australian pines were snapped off at ground level and fell into a weave extending up 60 feet. Ficus trees with bases 8 feet across were thrown on their sides. In all, we had 500 trees down with another 250 requiring work.

A lot of people in South Florida did not have shelter, so our first priority was to make the hotels accessible. By the second day after the storm, we had 50 people cleaning up, including four tree companies, our grounds crew and salaried executives of The Graham Companies.

We began on the golf courses by hand-raking all greens, tees and fairways. We cut and stacked all the wood in the roughs.

It is important to get a competent tree company on the job as soon as possible, but hauling the material away should be done by an excavating or engineering company experienced with moving massive quantities of brush in a short period of time. Fortunately, the Graham Companies Development Division has excellent relationships with several of these companies.

They used four tandem dump trucks, a backhoe/loader combination and a large loader with a standard bucket. Using the two loaders together to pack the material into the large loader, they could load a truck in a matter of minutes. They took 1,650 loads off the courses in 20 days.

We used a 40-ton crane, a smaller crane, and a backhoe to set up 24 large trees including large



Scott Wahlin is superintendent at Don Shula’s Hotel and Golf Club in Miami Lakes.



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oaks, African mahoganies, black olives and ficus. We dug a hole at the base of each tree with the backhoe and lifted and guided it in place with the cranes. A small loader replaced the soil around the base of the tree and this soil was watered into place using a 1,000-gallon water truck. Once the tree was in place, it did not require additional bracing.

Of all the trees we stood up, we lost only one oak.

It is probably better to wait until the local government has time to set up free dump sites before moving any debris farther than the closest rough area. Paying for your dumping can run into tens of thousands of dollars. And free dump sites will be open before you can get a permit to burn .

You can chip the debris if you don't have too much. I looked at one large chipper that went for \$3,500 per day. My project would have taken weeks and I would have been left with a mountain of mulch.

I was shocked to find that this tree work was not covered by our insurance. One agent told me he would be surprised if anyone were insured for this.

Business interruption resulting from the cleanup is covered. Removing trees from insured property (i.e., fences) is covered, but cleaning up your course after a storm usually is not covered.

Several weeks after the hurricane I was visited by an extension agent who told me he did not understand why golf courses should not receive funds from the Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service. I contacted Miles Hewett of the ASCS in Washington who told me that golf courses were specifically excluded because they are not considered production agriculture.

Don't expect any breaks from your local government. Shortly after the storm, the Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management sent me a certified letter requiring me to build a containment berm around our maintenance shop and apply a chemical-resistant coating to the shop floor

I was surprised at how much qualified cleanup help was available. There was adequate time and resources available to shop for price and get good companies. I developed a considerable list of qualified companies capable of doing the work.

Many companies including Stihl would only ship chain saws and generators to Miami. Several out-of-town tree companies asked to use our shipping address to get supplies they needed to help their customers in South Florida.

The morning after the hurricane, people came from everywhere to clean up streets and check on their neighbors. I found two guys working with our landscape crew who just came from a shelter and volunteered.

I think everyone experienced an initial sense of shock and rush of adrenaline. It was almost as if we got a lot of work done today and we would feel better. It did not work. The situation was unreal but it was our reality just the same and it would be for quite some time.

We worked 10-hour days for 14 days straight. This was a mistake. Our crew became quite fatigued which reduced efficiency and increased tension. It had been quite a long time since we had a good fight in the shop and we had one. In addition, we all had work to do at home so no one really got much rest when they left here.

I could probably write a book about my experiences with Hurricane Andrew. I could probably do the same regarding a horrible car accident I had on my way to Lake City Community College one January morning in 1982, or my father's unexpected death in my arms on the golf course on December 24, 1984.

I thank God for the events in my life that help me to gain wisdom and develop perseverance. I would say this experience was as traumatic as any I have been through, and I am eager to put it behind me.

Faith, hope and, most of all, time...

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT WAHLIN

This fallen African mahogany was one of 10 such trees at Don Shula's Hotel and Golf Club that was uprighted and saved, according to Scott Wahlin, superintendent.

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