

Character, leadership, teamwork

When a crisis occurs



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I'm not the first person to observe that crisis illuminates character.

Hurricane Andrew, the Big One we've been expecting for decades, violated the southern tip of the Sunshine State Aug. 24. As the authors of Victorian novels put it, he "had his way" with us. Rape is too mild a word for the physical, economic and emotional devastation this father of all storms ripped out of south Dade County.

Tornadoes destroy neighborhoods; Andrew took out half a county with one mighty punch below the citrus belt. Flattened it. Took away its innocence, its infrastructure and its image of invincibility in a few predawn hours that must have been sheer terror to those who lived through it.

But we've all seen the television pictures, talked with friends who were taken to the mat by Andrew and many of us took sight-seeing excursions to what used to be Kendall and Perrine and Homestead, often in the guise of pressing business.

Still, I wasn't all that excited when I learned that this issue of *The Florida Green* was going to focus on Hurricane Andrew. We know the damage was bad, but of more than 1,000 golf courses in Florida, fewer than 100 were disrupted by the storm and fewer than a dozen suffered really significant damage. My own golf course, about 70 miles north of the hurricane's eye, sustained nothing more than a messy layer of leaves and small branches — less than we often get in a fast-moving summer thunderstorm.

Then I began to read my fellow superintendents' stories of their recovery from the storm. More than one wrote about the "true grit" displayed by crew

members, many left homeless themselves, who worked bone-numbing hours to help homeowners remove debris and water from their homes before turning their attention to the golf course.

I wondered, with a touch of awe, at the loyalty of workers who would labor like mules for long hours to clear debris and restore golf courses to playable condition in just a few days. Loyalty like that is developed only through enlightened leadership.

Rodney McNeill, superintendent at Calusa CC, wrote how proud he was to be part of an organization that would raise relief funds, not for its own members, but for its members' employees. Yes, I'm proud of our Hurricane Andrew Relief Fund too — and of David Meda, assistant superintendent at Boca West CC, for getting the ball rolling.

But more than anything else, I am proudest of the leadership exhibited by those superintendents who faced Hurricane Andrew's full fury and dealt with its aftermath. It's not uncommon for one person to rise up and perform an act of heroism in a cataclysmic moment. It's an altogether different matter to instill a sense of loyalty and dedication in your work force so that, when a crisis occurs, it will instinctively and unselfishly meet the challenge and focus on the job at hand.

While it is important to know what needs to be done, the real test is getting people to do it in the face of adversity. I'd say the character of golf course superintendents came through Hurricane Andrew standing tall and shining brightly.