



The staff at Broken Sound Club is used to hurricane preparation. Photo: Joe Hubbard

Never too early

For Joe Hubbard, the name Wilma will always provoke a certain dread. Hubbard, golf course superintendent at Broken Sound Club in Boca Raton, Fla., has put the golf course back together after a few violent storms during his time there, though none have caused as much havoc as Hurricane Wilma.

Hubbard and his crew had just cleaned up after the damage Hurricane Francis caused in 2004 when Wilma hit the area in October 2005 with 140-mile-per-hour winds and caused more than \$1 million worth of damage. It

took more than a year to clean up, Hubbard says, adding that trees were wiped out, changing the layout of the course.

"Nothing will ever be exactly as it was before the hurricane," he says. "You can't replace the trees; the landscape was devastated."

Other named storms, including Jeanne, Frances and Katrina tore through the course and left a mess, though none were as devastating as Wilma.

This year, the chances of Hubbard and his crew getting a break look grim. Weather expert William Gray recently released

his prediction that there will be 17 named storms this year, five of them major hurricanes. Gray, who heads the Tropical Meteorology Project at Colorado State University, says the probability of a major storm reaching land on the U.S. coast this year is 74 percent, compared with the average of 52 percent throughout the past century.

While hurricane season is still a few months away, golf course superintendents who've been affected by storms say it's not too early to form an emergency plan.

Hubbard was the first of his

team to get to the course after Hurricane Wilma, allowing the crew to put their families' safety first. He spent many hot, humid nights on a cot in his office as he and the crew worked seven days a week to get the course back into shape. The power was out for several days, which made the high temperatures more unbearable.

The crew cleaned up the downed oak and Ficus trees, replaced the damaged sod and refilled the bunkers. Bunker sand had blown probably 50 miles away, Hubbard says. He brought in heavy equipment, including

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front-end loaders, as needed, but says some courses spent the money to have them on hand.

Hubbard hired contractors and temporary workers to share some of the workload with his crew. The blow Wilma dealt, just after cleanup from Jeanne was wrapping up, helped boost low morale among the workers, Hubbard says.

"I increased the crew's hours for a couple of months and put more money into my people's pockets," he says. "They had more money to help their families."

In the wake of such disasters, Hubbard would like to see more collaboration. Golf courses with less damage should put politics aside and help neighboring courses who aren't as lucky.

Terry Wood, golf course superintendent at Naples National Golf Club, says the last time a major hurricane hit that part of Florida was Donna in 1960. But even storms considered minor can cause damage. After Wilma blew through in 2005, the course was left with \$1.5 million worth of damage.

The course was just starting its season and had been open for two or three weeks when news of a storm came through. The course was closed the day before it was supposed to hit that area. This gave the staff time to move their families to a safe place. The storm dumped more than five inches of rain on the golf course – not bad compared to other locations and other storms that year, Wood says. But the winds that accompanied it were enough to cause considerable damage.

"We lost more than 635 trees, many of them pine trees," he says.

Wood's 24-man crew was on the course the day after the storm helping to make it playable again. Contractors helped grind the

trees and haul the stumps away. With the exception of a roof, most damage was contained to the debris scattered around the course, Wood says. The power outage lasted for a few days.

Hubbard and Wood say people in general are more prepared for hurricanes now than they were two years ago. More businesses are ready with backup generators. Golf courses in storms' paths have better ideas about how to prepare for a natural disaster.

Hubbard and Wood already have started to prepare for the storm season. Items on their checklists include:

- Create hurricane preparedness kits that include flashlights, medical supplies, contact sheets with information for emergency generators and a bottled water supplier;
- Meet with the other department heads and create or review an emergency plan;
- Keep a list of emergency contact information for all employees;
- Have the name of a reliable tree contractor lined up;
- Avoid as much tree damage as possible by trimming trees before the hurricane season starts; and
- Keep an adequate fuel supply.

Be sure gas pumps are manual, not electric, in case power is lost.

Storm seasons don't always turn out how they're predicted. For example, Gray forecast 17 named storms for 2006 including nine hurricanes, five of them major ones. Instead, there were 10 named storms and five hurricanes, two of them major hurricanes.

But Hubbard doesn't focus on the numbers.

"Whether they say there will be two or 30 storms, we always try to stay prepared," he says. "That's what a true Floridian does." – HW

From nine to five

What started out as a nine-hole addition at Hinckley (Ohio) Hills Golf Course ended up as a five-hole course aimed to attract beginners, youngsters or those who simply don't have time to play nine or 18 holes.

The project began eight years ago, according to golf course superintendent Jean Esposito. Her family, who owns the 18-hole, Harold Pack, Sr.-designed course, wanted to add nine holes but encountered problems securing land necessary for that size addition. Three years later, after five new holes were completed (three on the back side, then two more on the front side), they were integrated into the existing course and a cluster of five par-4 holes were made into The Buzzard's Nest, named after the bird who visits the course yearly.

"The Buzzard's Nest is good for the mother and son who like to play, but think nine holes is too much," Esposito says. "We thought five would be just enough."

Esposito hopes that attracting a more diverse group of golfers will help improve business. Yearly rounds at Hinckley Hills are below 20,000, not nearly what they used to be, she says, citing the economy, gas prices and competing outlets for people's disposable income as some of the causes for the decline.

When the Buzzard's Nest opened, it included holes four, five, six, 12, 13 and 14 from the existing course. The newly built holes took their places, moving from the inside of the course to the outer edges. The holes from the existing course that were taken out of play for the five-hole course sat out of commission before the Buzzard's Nest opened to give the stressed turf a break.

The original 18 holes opened in 1964. Until a few years ago, the layout hasn't been changed. The only exception was 10 years after it opened when the front nine became the back nine and vice versa.

In the beginning, Esposito's family was one of three owners. Each of the three families, including the children, labored to build the course. Much of the work was done in-house.

The original golf course superintendent (and Esposito's father) Donald Krush, 89, continues to keep her up to date on industry practices. He was involved heavily in the design and construction of the course, including the addition eight years ago.

"My dad was on a bulldozer during the construction," Esposito says.

The new holes were built consistently with the old ones. Penncross bentgrass (with some *Poa annua*) are on the greens, and a bluegrass/ryegrass/fescue mix is on the fairways. Esposito, along with her husband, Mark, nephews and a handful of other part- and full-time help, manage the grounds. Her sister, Sue Smith and nephew, Mike Smith, manage the concessions and pro shop, respectively.

Operating the course is a seven-day-a-week job for some of the family, which means holiday dinners during the golf season are spent in the clubhouse's back room. Esposito doesn't mind that because she enjoys the industry and aims to foster a greater enjoyment of the game among golfers, five holes at a time. –HW

