

# PICKING UP THE PIECES

**New Orleans superintendent Peter Carew maintains optimism for his life, his city and his livelihood in wake of Hurricane Katrina**

**STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY**

## THE PUTTING GREENS WEREN'T GREEN.

They were brown, as in dirt brown. The fairways and tees were brown, too, and comprised of more thatch than grass.

Still, the golfers came to play the Brechtel Memorial Park Municipal Golf Course in New Orleans. They came because they had to forget about their troubled lives, even if just for a few hours.

The golf course provided a sanctuary of sorts for the people, many whose lives had been shattered by the harrowing hurricane known as Katrina, which had struck only three months before.

Peter Carew, the long-time superintendent of the course, knew the anguished people needed a place like Brechtel to escape to. Some of the people had lost so much — their homes, possessions and jobs — that they had to go somewhere they could smile, even laugh, and forget about what had happened to them.

So Carew's quest was to get Brechtel, which had suffered flood and wind damage at the hurricane's wrath, back in operation as soon as possible.

In Carew's mind, it was simply a matter of providing peace of mind to people consumed with heartache. Carew asked himself: What pleasure can there be had in a human life if it only consists of a wrecked home to repair and a bar seat to slide into so one can drown his sorrows?

So on Dec. 1, about three months after Katrina had struck, Brechtel reopened. It didn't take long for the course's pebble-filled parking lot to become crowded with cars belonging to people from all walks of life. And they played the course's dirt-brown greens. And do you know what? Nobody complained — not one person.

"People were coming up and thanking me and shaking my hand," Carew says, still giddy about that day. "And I had never seen a golf course that looked so bad."

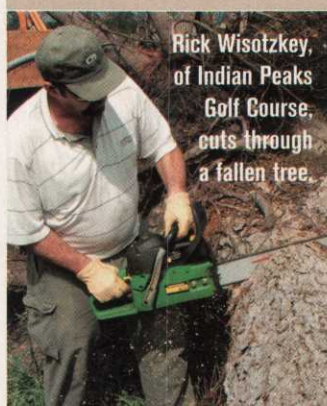
Carew shakes his head and chuckles. He

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# HELPING HANDS

By Larry Aylward  
Editor in Chief

They came, they worked and they left four New Orleans golf courses in much better condition than they had found them



Mission accomplished.

On March 19, Colorado golf course superintendent Steve Sarro and 29 of his industry counterparts returned from a road trip to New Orleans to work on four golf courses damaged by Hurricane Katrina last summer. The volunteers weren't sure what to expect when they arrived in the Big Easy for duty. But when their week-long trip was over, the volunteers earned a big thumbs up from the superintendents at the golf courses on the receiving end of their assistance.

"What we did may have seemed small in the beginning, but we left one hell of an impression down there," said Sarro, the 28-year-old superintendent of the Vail (Colo.) Golf Club who organized the effort.

On March 11, Sarro and his assembly, including several superintendents and turf students, left Colorado Springs in a caravan of vans and headed to New Orleans. They arrived on March 12 and went to work the following Monday morning at four courses: the Tournament Players Club of Louisiana, English Turn Golf & Country Club, the Golf Club at Audubon Park and Brechtel Memorial Park Municipal Golf Course.

"I'm just trying to help others," Sarro said before leaving on the trip. "I've always heard that your time means more than your money."

The New Orleans courses' superintendents welcomed the volunteers with open arms — and with chores they had been putting off for months because they didn't have enough staff to complete them.

Matt Yount, the superintendent at English Turn, told the volunteers, "It's just an awesome thing to have all you guys take time out of your lives to come down here and help us."

"The opportunity to have them come in and give us a hand with some things that we haven't been able to get to has been a big help,"

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AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

This fairway at the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club, which was underwater for six weeks, hardly resembles what it once was.

## SHUT DOWN

Effect of Hurricane Katrina on golf facilities in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

Closed	Number	Percent
1-3 days	56	31
4 days - 1 week	36	20
2-3 weeks	43	24
4-6 weeks	11	6
2-3 months	8	4
4 months	6	3
Never closed	2	1
Still closed	18	10

SOURCE: NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION TELEPHONE SURVEY

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PETER CAREW

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knows the people recognized he did his best to whip the tattered course into halfway-decent shape, and he appreciates them for understanding his arduous plight.

It's spring now, and Brechtel continues to garner steady play. In fact, the course is far ahead in revenues for the first three months of this year when compared to 2005.

"The place is packed every day," says Carew, noting a reason for the increased business is that golfers have few other places to play. "People keep asking me, 'You're not going to shut down, are you?'"

The golf course looks much better, too. The bermudagrass greens are popping, thanks to the warm weather. Yellow iris flowers around a pond are blooming.

It's a wonder that Carew and the diminished Brechtel staff were able to get the course open at all, let alone filled with golfers, so quickly.

"People thought it would be two years before you would see any life out here," Carew says. "It was phenomenal what we did."

Ann E. Macdonald, director of the

department of parks and parkways for the City of New Orleans and Carew's superior, says Carew was "adamant" about getting the course reopened. She says his determination to do so was a major reason why the city was able to reopen it so quickly.

"We are so proud of the work that he and the others have done," she says. "[Carew] is so passionate about the course."

Carew, who has worked for the city for about 21 years, wants to do more. He would like to reopen the other city golf course he manages, the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club, but he knows he might not get the chance. Bartholomew was destroyed and will cost millions to repair.

Like so many residents, the 52-year-old Carew is trying to regain a sense of normalcy in his life since the hurricane. Carew admits it has been easier for him than others. He didn't lose his house to the hurricane, although it was damaged. He also still has his job.

Carew, his wife and two children left New Orleans on Aug. 28 when the storm was bearing down on the city. They traveled to Natchitoches, La., in the northwest part of the state, where they stayed for about seven weeks. They spent four of those weeks sleeping on the gym floor at Northwestern State University, which was transformed into a Red Cross shelter.

About a week after Katrina hit, Carew left Natchitoches and went back to New Orleans to check on his house and help a friend in need. Carew discovered that looters had tried to break into his home. Fortunately, the plywood that Carew had nailed to his home's windows and doors had thwarted the thieves.

Carew spent two nights in his house before returning to Natchitoches to be with his family. With the looters still lurking and gunfire in the air, Carew went to sleep with a .357 Magnum resting on his chest.

Carew, who was born and raised in Connecticut but has lived in New Orleans for 30 years, was anxious to return to work when he and his family returned to New Orleans in late October. When he did get back to work, it wasn't at the golf course, however. Carew was placed in charge of a cleanup crew, which removed trash and debris from elevated areas

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## Picking Up the Pieces

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where evacuees had been living when the city was underwater. But Macdonald soon had Carew transferred back to Brechtel and challenged him to get the golf course back in operation.

When Carew returned to Brechtel, he didn't recognize it. The clubhouse looked like King Kong had torn it apart. The grass had grown to nearly 5 feet tall throughout the course, and hundreds of trees were either uprooted or snapped like toothpicks at their trunks.

The chain-link fence surrounding the 100-acre course was flattened. A good portion of it was in the street and getting run over by traffic.

Brechtel had been submerged in about 4 feet of water for two weeks. If there's a silver lining, it's that the course was flooded by freshwater, not the more corrosive saltwater.

Brechtel's PGA golf pro, Fred Frederickson, who was born and raised in New Orleans and has worked at the course for 27 years, also returned for work. Frederickson told Carew that he would help him any way he could to get the course open.

"Fred came out with his gloves on and said he'd do whatever I wanted him to do," says Carew, noting that he never could have reopened the course without Frederickson's assistance.

"This is my bread and butter," Frederickson says matter-of-factly. "If the course isn't open, I don't make any money. I have a family to feed."

Brechtel normally has a crew of nine, but only one worker from that crew returned. That employee, Raymond Joseph, has worked with Carew for 18 years. "I wanted to come back," says the 57-year-old Joseph. "It's just so pleasant to work here."

Two other city employees from different departments were reassigned to work at Brechtel. The men, Roderrick Rick and Bill Elliott, were placed in charge of raising and repairing the fence. During a lunch break recently, the

two sat outside Brechtel's clubhouse and discussed the massive undertaking.

"We've accomplished a lot, but there's still a lot that needs to be done," says the 59-year-old Rick, formerly with the city's tree department. Rick, who lived in the hard-hit Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, lost his home and most all of his possessions. He currently lives in a trailer on his brother's property.

The 55-year-old Elliott has been a city employee for 37 years. "They said it couldn't be done . . . the way that fence looked," Elliott says. "But we love a challenge."

"It has been a phenomenal effort," Carew says of their work. "I take my hat off to them."

Carew says he has little money to spend on course maintenance. Not surprisingly, his maintenance budget was cut, as were those of many of the city's departments because New Orleans is so low on money.

But with 30 years in the business at courses with moderate to low budgets, Carew has learned to be a resourceful

superintendent. As he says, he's learned how to make something out of nothing.

Upon returning to the course, Carew and his small crew got to work cleaning it up. First, all of the downed trees and debris were removed. Then the towering grass was cut. Carew used a Bush Hog mower, known for its toughness, to mow the turf. He used a back hoe with claw teeth to pick up the piles of thatch left behind.

While flooding damaged much of Brechtel's maintenance equipment, some industry companies have come to the course's aid with donations. The Toro Co. donated a utility vehicle, and Syngenta Professional Products gave a supply of herbicide.

The course is still without irrigation, and Carew has been trying to get an electrician out to repair it. But the electricians in the area have more important projects to do. "I tried to entice one guy out here by giving him a free round of golf," Carew jokes.

Despite his ingenuity, Carew doesn't hide the fact that he needs more money to keep the course going. He's concerned about the course's health, especially the greens, if the irrigation system isn't repaired soon.

As the crow flies, Brechtel and the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club are about five miles apart and on opposite sides of the Mississippi River. Despite their close proximity, the courses sustained contrasting damage, especially in terms of flooding.

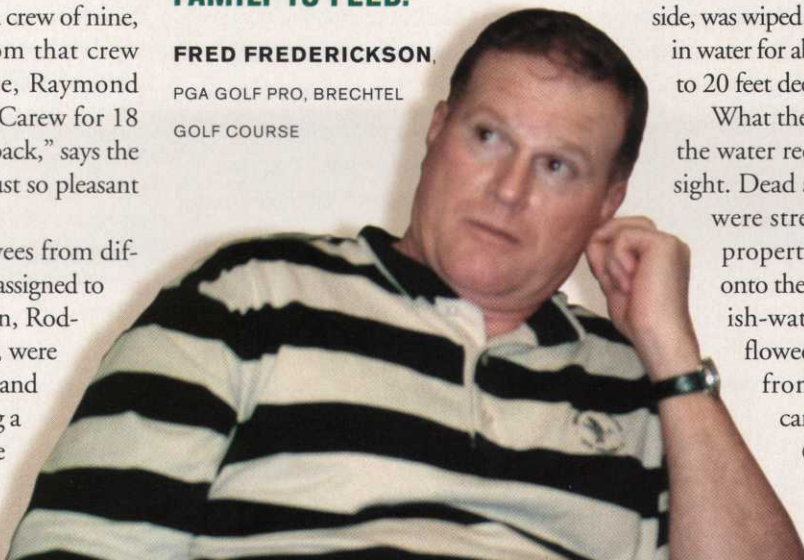
Bartholomew, located on the river's east side, was wiped out. It was submerged in water for about six weeks, 15 feet to 20 feet deep in some areas.

What the course revealed after the water receded was a dreadful sight. Dead sharks and other fish were strewn throughout the property. The fish funneled onto the course when a brackish-water lake nearby overflowed after being flooded from a nearby broken canal levee.

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**"THIS IS MY BREAD AND BUTTER. IF THE COURSE ISN'T OPEN, I DON'T MAKE ANY MONEY. I HAVE A FAMILY TO FEED."**

**FRED FREDERICKSON,**  
PGA GOLF PRO, BRECHTEL  
GOLF COURSE



## Picking Up the Pieces



(Clockwise from top left) An abandoned car near the first tee at Joe Bartholomew Golf Club; the rusted gear shift of a mower after being under saltwater; a gutted house across the street from Bartholomew.



Carew also discovered hundreds of dead birds, killed when they were blown from their roosts by the storm's fierce winds.

For several months after the water had receded, the golf course was colored in one hue — brown.

"It was nothing but death — dead trees, dead grass, dead everything," Carew says. "And the smell would just knock you out of your socks."

During a return visit to the course recently, Carew admits it's difficult for him to come to the area. It's a ghost town; the only sound is the whipping wind. While the course isn't completely suffused in brown anymore, Carew points out that its patches of green are mostly comprised of weeds and *Poa annua*.

"These fairways were totally renovated," Carew says sullenly. "You can see where the trees were ripped out."

Carew points to the massive ruts in the fairways, caused by 18-wheel trucks that roamed the soggy course to pick up and carry away the fallen trees.

Carew walks to the first tee, which offers a strange site. At the bank of the dead 419 bermudagrass on the tee sits an abandoned and formerly submerged Ford Taurus, its wheels sunk in the ground. Carew says someone probably drove the car on the course to get to higher ground. It wasn't high enough, obviously.

Houses across the street from the course and throughout the neighborhood are abandoned. The flood waters, which had reached the peaks of their roofs, decimated them.

Many of the houses have been gutted, which means everything from ceilings, carpet and sheetrock have been removed from their interiors. The houses, with only concrete slabs

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The course was in the final stages of a \$1 million renovation when Katrina hit. A celebration was planned for the course's reopening in September, with an appearance by Mayor Ray Nagin.

A new irrigation system had been installed throughout the course two years earlier. It was destroyed after being under saltwater for so long — its wiring and conduits rusted and corroded.

The course's new clubhouse was wrecked by wind and water. The maintenance facility, which was only 2 years old, is located on higher ground and was under 15 feet of water for only three weeks but long enough to cause substantial damage. When the water waned, Carew saw mowers, weed eaters and other equipment caked with rust and oxide. He says the equipment looked like it was 100 years old.

The course lost about 90 percent of its trees, including some massive 80-year-old oaks. The remaining trees are dying, poisoned by the high salinity of the saltwater.

It seemed as if every other tree dotting the sides of the course's fairways had fallen. Their treetops met each other in the middle of the fairways.

## TO MAKE A DONATION

If anyone would like to donate to New Orleans' last-standing city-owned golf course — Brechtel Memorial Park Municipal Golf Course — they can contact superintendent Peter Carew at [pcarew@cityofno.com](mailto:pcarew@cityofno.com) or 504-261-8728. Carew says he needs "everything." Monetary donations are also welcome. Checks can be made out to the "Parks and Parkway Department" (please indicate donation is for Brechtel Golf Course) and mailed to Peter Carew at 3700 Behrman Place Highway, New Orleans, La. 70114.

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and wooden beams under their roofs, are shells of what they were. Ugly piles of rubble, topped with waterlogged furniture and other damaged mementos, sit on tree lawns in front of the ravaged homes.

"It's house after house after house of devastation," Carew says. "It's mile after mile after mile."

It will cost about \$5 million to repair Bartholomew, not including the maintenance facility and clubhouse. MacDonald says the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will help pay for building damage at Bartholomew and Brechtel as well as repairs to the irrigation systems. But the agency won't pay to restore any turf damage.

"We can't let it die," Carew says of Bartholomew. "It would make me proud if we got it going again. The community deserves it."

But Carew understands why the course

is low on the city's priority list of rebuilding tasks. After all, tens of thousands of residents had their lives turned upside down.

"When you have miles and miles of the community with no power, golf courses are the last thing on their minds," he says.

Even if the course did reopen in the next year, Carew wonders if there would be anybody to play it.

"Are the people coming back?" he asks, scanning the desolate neighborhood.

Carew scavenged the damaged maintenance facility at Bartholomew for parts, even rummaging around the rubble for screws. He doesn't have a lot of equipment, and he welcomes any donations.

Sadly, a lot of equipment at Brechtel was stolen. Looting was widespread in New Orleans following the hurricane, and thieves didn't spare Brechtel's maintenance facility.

The metal door to the facility is mangled. You can see where the looters ripped

the door open with a crowbar. Carew says they stole three 72-inch deck fairway mowers in addition to a hand mower, a weed eater, an electric sprayer and hand tools. They drove the mowers out of the facility, stripped them and abandoned them.

Carew holds up a small pump sprayer. "It's the only thing I have left that they didn't steal," he says.

Carew is still irked by the looting, but he tries not to let his anger fester. Since the hurricane, Carew's emotions have run the gamut, from frustration to sadness to fury. Carew, however, strives to maintain optimism about his life, his city and his profession.

"We're just trying to hold it together," he says. "New Orleans people are hard people. They'll be back."

Thanks to Carew, they're already back at the golf course — a place where they know they can find tranquility, if only for a few hours. ■

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said Jim Moore, superintendent of the TPC of Louisiana.

"It's a blessing," said Walker Sory, superintendent of the Golf Club at Audubon Park. "They came at just the right time."

"I don't know what to say," said an elated Peter Carew, the superintendent of Brechtel Memorial Park Municipal Golf Course. "To come to such a little course . . . it just makes me choke up to think they're coming here to help us."

During the week, Carew had volunteers raking up branches and twigs under trees. Carew worried he was subjecting them to a menial task, but he stressed how important a job it was because the sticks were getting jammed in the course's gang mower and damaging its reels. "They're probably thinking they came all this way to rake sticks, but they don't realize how much help they're providing," Carew said.

Sory said his course had "much-needed bunker work" to be done that his

short-handed staff hadn't had time to do. The volunteers at the course manicured the ragged edges of the course's 62 bunkers. They seized the chore with hover mowers, weed eaters and blowers.

Sory, who has been at the course for almost five years, employed 15 people before the storm. Because of budget cuts, Sory can only afford to have seven workers on his staff, and they're not allowed to work overtime.

Audubon experienced mainly wind damage from Katrina. The course had some flooding but not from the terrible deluge caused by broken levees. "That water stopped about five blocks from here," Sory says.

Moore said the volunteers helped "springboard" the TPC's reopening, which will occur in late summer or early fall. The TPC experienced internal flooding and thousands of trees were damaged, Moore says. The course's bunkers were flooded and debris dominated the property.

Moore had the volunteers repairing



greenside bunkers that were submerged in water for nearly two weeks. The volunteers removed the old sand, repaired the drainage and added new sand.

The TPC is trying to staff up, but hiring has been a problem because so many people have left the area. Some businesses are getting back up and running. There's a demand for employees, but the employee pool is limited. So superintendents are competing with fast-food restaurants, with

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