

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."

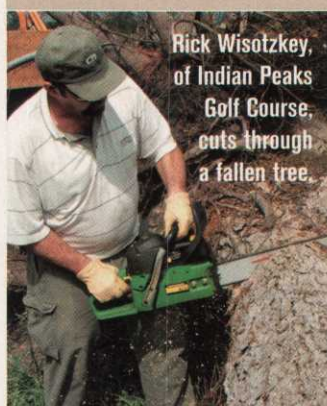
Carew shakes his head and chuckles. He

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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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Picking Up the Pieces

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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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Helping Hands

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some offering \$10-an-hour wages and signing bonuses, to attract personnel.

"If you drive around the city, you'll see there's not a company that's not looking for help, whether it's Walmart or Home Depot," Moore said.

Yount said English Turn lost two of its full-time staff members, but it hasn't experienced any major labor problems because it employs several Hispanics through the government's H2-B visa program.

That said, English Turn was in a hurry to ready the course for the Zurich Classic of New Orleans, held April 27-30. Ironically, the tournament was moved from the TPC to English Turn because the TPC sustained more storm damage.

Joe McCleary, the certified superintendent of Saddle Rock Golf Course, was one of the volunteers at English Turn. The 40-year-old McCleary spent much time in the course's vast waste bunkers, where the volunteers spread new layers of sand.

McCleary, like several of the volunteers, took vacation time from his job to take the trip. He also left behind a busy family life. McCleary said he liked the idea of the trip from the beginning.

"I supported [Sarro] when he brought up the idea so I felt like I needed to support him by following through and coming out," he said.

Like McCleary, Michael Osley had to place a busy life on hold to take the trip. Osley, the certified superintendent of Aurora Hills Golf Club in Aurora, Colo., said he had a million reasons not to go, but he's glad he went.

"It was the right thing to do," Osley said. "I took some vacation time, and I can't think of a better way to spend it than to come down here and help my peers."

With that, Osley grabbed a trimmer and got back to work on an overgrown bunker edge at Audubon Park. Osley, dressed in jeans, a white T-shirt and a sweat-stained blue hat with the Titleist logo, headed a crew of seven volunteers who manicured the bunkers.

The volunteers also included several



(Clockwise from top left) Steve Sarro organized the trip; the volunteers never dogged it; Syngenta's Bart Fox (left) and Tim Klein cooked dinner; the volunteers' mode of transportation told the story of their venture.

turf students, from Colorado State University and the University of Wyoming, who were on spring break.

Jared Stanek, a senior in the University of Wyoming's turf program, said he was thankful he could help. "It's about putting the community back together, and golf is a part of the community here," he added. "This is where we can best supply our talents."

Before leaving on the trip, Sarro said he expected people who see golf only as a luxury to question the mission while contending there are people and places in New Orleans that need help more than golf courses. While Sarro doesn't deny that, he also stressed that golf courses are more than just a luxury for the rich — they are a haven for all walks of life, places where people go to enjoy themselves and forget their troubles. Besides that, Sarro and his crew were helping their comrades.

"I'm sure there are people that need dental care down there, but I'm not a dentist," Sarro says. "This is what I know how to do."

The Golf Course Superintendents

Association of America (GCSAA) and Syngenta Professional Products each donated \$10,000 to the cause. Ewing Irrigation and The Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendents Association also kicked in several thousand dollars.

Joe DiPaola, the golf market manager for Syngenta, said he made the donation because he was inspired by the volunteers' effort. "It's something we could do, should do and we did," he said.

Bart Fox and Tim Klein, technical sales representatives for Syngenta, cooked dinner for the volunteers during the week. Every day Fox and Klein lugged a massive outdoor cooker to a different course where the volunteers were working.

Pat Ardoin, a salesman for Ewing, supplied each volunteer with a survival pack, which included sunscreen, a water bottle and a jacket. Ardoin, a former superintendent, calls on many golf courses in the Gulf Coast area affected by the hurricane. "This is something we wanted to be part of," he said.

During the trip, Sarro said he hopes the mission transforms into something bigger. He would like to see the industry implement an annual National Golf Maintenance Week to assist courses damaged by natural disasters. Volunteers could travel to hard-hit areas to lend a hand.

"We've planted the seed," Sarro said. ■