

# TAKING UP THE CAUSE

Ample donation from Carolinas superintendents will help New Orleans golf course survive

**STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY AYLWARD**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

It's hot enough on this June day in New Orleans to melt ice caps at the North Pole. But it still feels like Christmas to Peter Carew.

That's because Carew, the golf course superintendent of the city's Brechtel Memorial Park Golf Course, has awakened on this muggy morning to two 18-wheel trucks delivering thousands of dollars' worth of refurbished turf maintenance equipment to him and his crew. The equipment, sorely needed by Carew to keep his modest golf course in operation, has arrived courtesy of the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association. Carew lost most of his equipment to the wicked tag team of flooding and looting induced by Hurricane Katrina, which struck New Orleans and the Gulf states almost two years ago.

On hand to greet Carew with the equipment are Billy Lewis and Mitch Wilkerson, the pres-

ident and vice president of the Carolinas GCSA. They watch as Carew eyes the equipment like a kid would a new bicycle under a Douglas fir on Dec. 25.

An exuberant Carew says it's hard to believe what he sees, including two triplex greens mowers, a tractor, a gang mower, a utility vehicle and other equipment — all refurbished to the tune of about \$30,000. In addition, Lewis and Wilkerson present a check to Carew for \$2,500 on behalf of the association's members.

Quite simply, the gifts are Brechtel's saving grace. The course was close to its demise because it lacked functional equipment for turf maintenance.

"This course would have shut down," Carew says. "I don't know what I would have done. This makes me feel reborn."

The Carolinas GCSA learned of Carew's plight after he and two other Gulf-area superintendents spoke during the association's conference and trade show last November. The 52-year-old Carew, who has worked for the city of New Orleans for about 22 years, moved attendees with his poignant speech

For Peter Carew (second from right) and two crew members, Raymond Joseph (to his right) and David Donner (to his left), the equipment delivery was like Christmas. To Carew's far left is Timothy Lavelle, chief of operations for New Orleans' Department of Parks and Parkways. Next to him are Mitch Wilkerson and Billy Lewis of the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association.





The equipment arrived on two 18-wheel trucks on a steamy June day.



Superintendent Peter Carew is all smiles as he drives a greens mower off a truck.

about life and work after the hurricane.

Carew told attendees how he was able to reopen Brechtel, which had been submerged in 4 feet of water for two weeks, only three months after Katrina hit. Carew talked about how storm-weary golfers thanked him for reopening the course, even though they were putting on dirt greens. Carew also told attendees about the other city golf course he managed, the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club, which was destroyed and will cost \$11 million to repair.

After hearing Carew's talk, Randy Allen, director of golf course operations for The Burroughs and Chapin Co. in Myrtle Beach, S.C., told a group of people, "We're going to help him." Allen then rallied the association's members to the cause.

The Carolinas GCSA Board of Directors debated the matter. Trent Bouts, the association's public relations officer, said the board knew that other courses were damaged by the storm. "But they clearly felt that Carew's case was extreme and his determination in the face of enormous obstacles deserved all the support we could possibly muster," Bouts adds.

The Carolinas GCSA asked Charlotte-based Smith Turf & Irrigation to help with the cause. The distributor, in turn, picked up the donated equipment from various golf

courses, hauled it back to its building and refurbished it for below cost. Bob Bell, the distributor's vice president of commercial sales and operations, says the equipment received "extra-special" attention. Revels Tractor Co., a distributor in Fuquay-Varina, N.C., also helped with the equipment refurbishment.

"I hope the equipment lasts [Carew] four or five years," Bell says. "We're proud to be part of this."

It's obvious to Carew the equipment received extra-special attention. He has received other equipment donations, for which he's thankful, but much of it required repairs. Carew was able to fix some of the equipment, which he's using at Brechtel.

The Carolinas GCSA's donation couldn't have come at a better time. In fact, time was

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### Rally the Troops

Billy Lewis, president of the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association, campaigns to reopen New Orleans course destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. See Larry Aylward's Pin High column on page 8.

## Taking up the Cause



**Mitch Wilkerson (left) and Billy Lewis (right), standing with Carew on the 18th green, are inspired by Carew's tenacity to persevere.**

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running out on Carew, who says he told his superiors in April that the course's lone greens mower was near its demise. Carew was told there was no money to fix it and was asked to do everything he could to keep it running.

About a month later, Carew received a call from Chuck Borman, Carolinas GCSA's executive director, who told him the association wanted to make an equipment donation. Carew only hoped it was equipment that

could hit the ground running. He was tired of having to constantly improvise to keep the old equipment working. For instance, the reel on Brechtel's only-operating greens mower didn't spin forward. It did spin backward, however, and Carew reversed the hydraulic line so that when the mower was put in reverse, the reel would spin forward.

"That is how we've been cutting greens," he says.

Carew has always been one to make do with coat hangers and duct tape in his 35 years as a superintendent. But he has taken improvising to another level the past two years.

Carew hasn't had a choice to do otherwise, though. The city has no money to buy him any new equipment. The tax revenues from an again-viable Bourbon Street have gone to more important city initiatives, such as ambulance and fire services. While the city set aside about \$30,000 for maintenance at

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## A Course And Its Superintendent Are Reborn By Larry Aylward

The Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association's donation of refurbished equipment and cash to Brechtel Memorial Park Golf Course will help keep the New Orleans facility in business. That's good news because business is booming at the course, says Peter Carew, Brechtel's superintendent.

While Brechtel is far from the condition Carew would like to have it in — it's still recovering from the damage inflicted by Hurricane Katrina two years ago — the course is flourishing with play. In May, the course recorded its most rounds since the hurricane.

"Before the storm we were doing between 40,000 to 50,000 rounds," Carew says. "Now we're back up around 32,000 rounds."

Brechtel is the only municipal course that's open in the city. Katrina destroyed the other city-operated course that Carew oversees, the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club, and there is no plan to reopen it. The City Park Bayou Oaks Golf Facility, which includes three golf courses operated by the state, is also closed, and its future is in doubt. Audubon Park Golf Course is the only other public course in New Orleans that is open.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will provide Brechtel

\$980,000 and Bartholomew \$1.7 million to rebuild. Carew says Bartholomew sustained \$11 million in damage to the golf course and clubhouse. Brechtel endured about \$3 million in damage.

Carew says none of the golfers at Brechtel complain about the course's condition, although it has improved immensely since reopening. Most golfers realize they are fortunate to have a place to play at all — and for the bargain price of \$22 for 18 holes with a golf car.

Brechtel has also become a destination for quasi golfers, people who just want to walk the property because many of the city's parks are still shut down.

"They use it as a place for exercise," Carew says.

About 75 Canada geese have also become an attraction at the course. Brechtel has never had Canada geese living on the course before.

"Most superintendents want to get rid of Canada geese," Carew says. "We love them here."

That's because there hasn't been much wildlife at Brechtel in the past two years. Wild dogs left lurking after the storm killed

the wildlife that wasn't wiped out by the hurricane. Strange as it sounds, the geese represent hope.

"They are a small sign of our rebirth," Carew says.

Carew has also undergone a rebirth of sorts. The hurricane changed him, he says, for the better. Having gone weeks without a decent meal after the storm, Carew doesn't take for granted the small pleasures in life, like dining out at a fine restaurant or taking a ride on his Harley.

The weeks after Katrina were a trying time for him — more trying than people will ever know. "There are a lot of things I saw that I can't talk about to this day," Carew says. "But you have to move on."

According to the latest census figures, about 193,000 people have left New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. But Carew never thought of leaving.

"It would have been easy to leave," he says. "It was harder to stay."

Carew says he stayed because he wants to be part of the city's renaissance. It will take many years, he admits, but it will happen.

"New Orleans is not going anywhere," he says. ■

### “This is a major shot in the arm.”

**ANNE MACDONALD**

DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT  
OF PARKS AND PARKWAYS FOR  
THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

**Raymond Joseph, who has worked at Brechtel for nearly 20 years, says of the equipment donation: “It’s beautiful. It’s a blessing.”**



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Brechtel, Carew was told to try to conserve all the money.

But as Carew helps unload one of the greens mowers from the truck, he appears more assured about Brechtel's future, as well as his own.

Carew is not the only one with a grin on his face as the equipment is driven off the trucks at the city's Department of Parks & Parkways location. Raymond Joseph, who has worked on Carew's crew for nearly 20 years, casts an expansive smile.

"We needed this equipment," Joseph says. "It's beautiful. It's a blessing."

Anne E. Macdonald, the city's director of the Department of Parks and Parkways and Carew's superior, is ecstatic that the equipment is in such fine condition. While not a golfer, Macdonald realizes how important it is for the city to offer residents a nice place to play golf so they can escape from their Katrina-caused troubles, even if for just a few hours.

"This is a major shot in the arm," she says.

It's not just the equipment donation that impresses Carew. It's that Lewis and Wilkerson made the trip to New Orleans to meet him. That gesture, Carew says, has boosted his morale in mankind, something he badly needed after witnessing so many human atrocities committed during the utter turmoil of the hurricane's aftermath.

Lewis and Wilkerson are glad they made the trip, too. They are inspired by Carew's tenacity to persevere. "If I didn't come, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to meet what I would deem a great American hero," Lewis says of Carew.

Wilkerson once called New Orleans home. He helped build the city's English Turn Golf & Country Club and worked there from 1987 through 1990. He says he feels good that the Carolinas GCSA donation will help enrich the city's lone municipal golf course.

And it already has. In July, Brechtel's golfers told Carew how thankful they were for the new equipment that helped to improve the course's condition.

"Our equipment and money is not going to feed anybody," Wilkerson says. "But it will help give peace of mind to somebody who's playing golf for a few hours a week."

Carew gave Lewis and Wilkerson a tour of New Orleans during their visit. He took them to what's left of the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club, which was submerged in water for about six weeks — 15-feet to 20-feet deep in some areas. The course was in the final stages of a \$1-million renovation when Katrina hit. It's re-opening celebration never took place.

The land now resembles more of wasteland than a golf course, with dying trees and scrubby, overgrown weed-infested grass. Standing outside the dilapidated clubhouse, Lewis sighs deeply when asked what he thinks of what he sees.

"What comes to mind is the irony of it all," he says, explaining that golf courses in North Carolina are closing and being sold because of their high real-estate value. "Then you look at this property and realize it's a disaster, and there are no funds to renovate it."

Seeing the hurricane-ravaged city hit close to home for Lewis and Wilkerson because of the potential for such destructive hurricanes in the Carolinas.

"Both states have a coast line, and the majority of our courses are on that coast line," Wilkerson says.

The two have experienced their share of hurricanes, including five in the last three years. One of the worst hurricanes Lewis endured was Floyd in 1999. But it was nothing like Katrina.

"That was like having a cold compared to this, which is like having cancer," he says.

Wilkerson remembers the destruction that Hurricane Hugo caused to the Charleston, S.C., area in 1989. It took two to three years for the region to recover.

Carew expects it will take New Orleans about 15 to 20 years to recover.

Before returning home, Lewis and Wilkerson promise Carew that they won't forget about him and his plight.

"We'll take care of you," Lewis promises.

Carew is obliged, not to mention relieved, to know there are people who still care about him and his city nearly two years after Katrina.

"That's good to know," he replies softly to Lewis.

It's mid-afternoon on a stifling-hot summer day in New Orleans. But it still feels like Christmas to Carew. ■