

JOB TALK

Miami Metrozoo on the road to recovery

■ One year after Hurricane Andrew hit Miami Metrozoo, the park is almost back to full operation, but Jorge Maura and his landscape crew members still face years of work to repair extensive damage.

Thousands of trees were torn from the ground, taking buildings, irrigation pipes, bedding plants, sod and asphalt walkways with them. Trees fell across moats, leaving bridges for animals that dared to venture out. The perimeter fence came down. Dangerous wild dogs entered the park. Maintenance vehicles were tossed about as if toys; seven vehicles were destroyed.

"Even before the storm hit, I sometimes thought if I could do this over, I would do it differently, a little better," Maura remembers. "That's what we're trying to do now. We're trying to put in the right kind of shade trees, plant low-maintenance hedges and add some color."

Facing the challenge—Maura didn't have fun during the first days after the storm. There was no electricity or water when he arrived at work. Andrew had left thousands of cubic yards of assorted rubble, including 700 dead pine trees, and a storm following the hurricane toppled another 60 trees.

"Our priorities got thrown around, but everything didn't stop growing," he comments. "The grass, hedges and bushes all kicked in right away."

As a result of lost shade from the fallen trees, and crew members being called away to other projects, "weeds took off," Maura recalls. "We were able to control them with Roundup herbicide and hand power. Right now, I would say that the entire zoo is



Hurricane Andrew destroyed the zoo's Lakeside Restaurant.

back under control, although weed control is an ongoing challenge."

Eighty volunteer members of Monsanto's Spontaneous Weed Attack Team (SWAT) helped clean up the weeds (see August 1993 issue of LM). Those volunteers saved Maura a week's work.

Replace trees, repair irrigation—More than 7,000 trees of many varieties are being replanted.

Varieties include mahogany, oaks and palms—the last of which survived the storm incredibly well and were also easy to straighten up. Maura is avoiding black olives.

"It drops leaves once a year and drops sap during summer, staining the walkways," he laments. Black olive trees are a potential hazard to zoo patrons and certain expense for Maura, because the root system cracks the asphalt walkways.

Maura is crafting the "new" zoo with flowers and color. For instance, instead of using a cherry hedge, he's adding ixora and 'Nora Grant.'

"We're changing the look of the zoo and reducing labor-intensive areas," he says. "For example, we selected hedges that droop down like a firecracker when it reaches its 3 1/2-foot height; not something we'd have to trim."

He's also adding varieties like yellow and pink trumpet trees and Hong Kong orchids, along with oaks.

Before the 500,000 square feet of grass that was lost is replaced, Maura must first repair irrigation systems damaged by uprooted trees. Following the storm, uprooted irrigation pipe was simply left above ground if it wasn't cracked. Sprinkler heads were repaired or replaced to the point where water could still be delivered to the trees.

"We still have to repair all that tubing and put it back in the ground," Maura sighs. "We kind of forgot about aesthetics to keep the trees alive. Now we're repairing damaged pipes, and installing irrigation where we didn't have it before."

"The zoo is back to 80 percent function," Maura says, "but our department's work has changed substantially. Usually, everyone is tied up doing routine duties. Since the storm, crew members have done an excellent job of handling the extra repairs and improvements."



Zoo crews are replanting thousands of trees. Palms weathered the storm well, and were easy to replant.