

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Going Toe to Toe With Mother Nature

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It was just getting hot and humid in the New Orleans area when I was visiting growers in late April. Down there, spring was just heading over the hump, so Tony Carter and his team at Langridge Plant Sales in Belle Chasse, Louisiana, were still in production mode for their IGC and landscape customers.

Started by Tony's uncle 40 years ago, Langridge is situated right along the banks of the Mississippi River—a prime target for hurricanes. Tony took over ownership 25 years ago and during that time, he's seen the worst of what Mother Nature can do. The green berth you see in the background of the main photo is a levee that's meant to hold the Mississippi's waters back during a

hurricane.

Tony recalled a time when that levee was no match for one of the worst hurricanes in Louisiana history: Katrina. He said the river breached the levee completely, flooding his outdoor production area under 3 ft. of water and washing away all of his benches.

During Hurricane Zeta, the metal carport attached to Tony's house—which is on the property—blew down, crashing into the sliding glass door and knocking it from its hinges. For two hours, Tony, his wife and daughter held the door into place, knowing that if wind got into the house it would lift the roof off. And just last year, a fluke tornado leveled two of his greenhouses and a hail storm tore through the poly.

Saying Tony and his staff have been through it all doesn't seem to fully encompass what they've had to deal with over the years, so I was struck by his remarkably positive outlook about it. He's come away from every major weather event with a new way to deal with the next one, learning from each experience.



They've installed concrete culvers under each bench of the outdoor production area to help drain any flood waters that breach the levee (inset). All of the benches are now made of metal set in concrete instead of placed on cinder blocks. And they've been fitting all of their greenhouses with reinforced double poly that can withstand 100-mph winds.

Tony is matter-of-fact, but realistic, about each setback. He and his team just assess the damage and get to work fixing it. It took them over a year to get back to normal operation after Katrina, and Tony said it was extremely difficult. But the year after was one of the best they'd ever had because people needed plants to

replace the ones they lost in the hurricane.

Tony's longtime Ball Seed sales rep Michele Andre said, "Out of all of my customers, they were the hardest hit, but they were the first one up and running."

"[The weather] is the one thing you can't totally plan for; I just take it year by year," Tony admitted. "It's scary that every year one hurricane can wipe you out." But then he said, "We've had a lot of challenges over the years, but I've never really questioned doing this."

So Tony and his team will continue to take Mother Nature's punches ... but they won't go down without a fight. **GT**