



**Number 12**  
**Par 5, 495 yards**  
**TPC at Tampa Bay**  
**Photo by Daniel Zelazek**



TPC AT TAMPA BAY

## Champions Tour Stop, Environmental Leader

*By Joel Jackson, CGCS*

Seventeen years ago golf course architect Bobby Weed and player consultant Chi Chi Rodriguez designed a golf course that was destined to host one of the players' favorite annual events on the Champions Tour, the Outback Steakhouse

Pro-Am. Additionally under the guidance of golf course superintendent Jason Kubel, the course has won consecutive Chapter Awards for Public Courses in the annual GCSAA and Golf Digest Environmental Leadership in Golf Awards (ELGA) in 2005 and 2006.

According to Kubel, the course

does more than 42,000 rounds per year and the highlight of the season is February, when the Champions Tour comes to town for the Pro Am event. "We draw as many spectators as a regular PGA Tour event," said Kubel. "This year senior 'rookie' Nick Price played the event.

"In the celebrity category, Bill



*This steep-faced bunker on No. 14 is among the fairway bunkers slated for reconstruction to improve drainage and prevent washouts. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

**Most notable was Nicklaus remembering Kubel from the construction of the King and the Bear courses at the World Golf Village in St. Augustine.**

Murray also played this year. Other entertainers who have played include Kevin Costner, Huey Lewis, Mark Wahlberg and Kevin Sorbo of Hercules fame. We also have a strong showing from the sports ranks with Emmitt Smith, Phil Simms, Joe Theisman, Ronde Barber and Derrick Brooks.

“The field is usually 70-80 players and includes approximately 16 celebrities. There is quite a scramble by the celebs to shoot well enough to make the cut and play on the third day. This is the first year we will be telecast live in High Definition on NBC. Most of the Champions Tour events are carried on the Golf Channel so this was a nice boost for us to be on network TV.

“With a \$2.6 million purse, we have one of the strongest fields of the year behind the majors, of course. Outback Steakhouse does such a great job of hosting the tournament that the event

is perennially voted number one on the tournament in several categories. The winner also gets the unlimited use of an Outback Steakhouse card.”

The event originally was called the Verizon Classic and Kubel recalls fond and bittersweet memories of those days when Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus teed it up. Most notable was Nicklaus remembering Kubel from the construction of the King and the Bear courses at the World Golf Village in St. Augustine. Kubel also remembers how the crowd gravitated to wherever Palmer was playing on the course during the practice rounds. Sadly on the first day of competition, the King threw his back out on his tee shot on the first hole and had to withdraw.

Besides working with the King and the Bear in St. Augustine in 2000-01, Kubel served as an assistant superintendent at the Isleworth G&CC

## COURSE FACTS



*TPC Tampa Bay Maintenance Staff*

## TPC at Tampa Bay

**Location:** Lutz

**Ownership:** PGA Tour

**Stats:** 18 holes; 6,898 yards; par 71

**Genealogy:** Designed by Bobby Weed and player consultant Chi Chi Rodriguez; construction by PGA Tour;

**Opened:** 1991

**Management Team:** Brady Boyd, general manager; Justin Wink, head golf professional; Jason Kubel, golf course superintendent

**Acreage under maintenance:** 152

**Greens:** Tifdwarf; avg. 7,000 sq.ft., total 4.0 acres; green speeds: 9-10, 10-11 for tournaments. All greens are overseeded with 3-way blend of *Poa trivialis* @ 20 lbs/M maximum.

**Tees, Fairways and Roughs:** Tifway 419 hybrid bermudagrass overseeded with Champion GC ryegrass. Tees 6 acres, HOC .425" overseeded @ 600 lbs/acre. Fairways 41 acres, HOC .475" overseeded @ 500 lbs/acre.

Roughs 101 acres, HOC 2.0" May-Oct, 3.0" Nov-April, overseeded @ 400 lbs/acre.

**Bunkers:** 80, sand type GA26 or USGA Spec. Raking: combination of hand and machine raking. John Deere Hydro-Pro with tines and scarifiers. Broom attachment during dry conditions. Hand rake all for tournaments.

**Natural areas:** 22 acres of wetlands, cypress bayheads and native areas consisting of cypress trees, mulch, ferns and native grasses.

**Waterways:** 17 lakes and ponds covering 22 acres managed monthly by Lake Masters. Hand removal of invasive plants quarterly.

**Irrigation:** Source – deep well; PSI Constant Speed Pump Station; Toro Site Pro/E-Osmac controller. 1,100 heads @ 75-ft. spacing. Fertigation system.

**Staff:** Total including superintendent, 22 including two part-time; Weekly budgeted hours - 935 ST and 83 OT. No seasonal variation of labor.

**Key team members:** First Assistant Brad Shaeffer, Second Assistant James Pichler, Equipment Manager Jeff Young, Pest Control Tech Mike McNamara, Irrigation Tech Mark Batchelor and Admin Assistant Kathy Amick.



*View of the 18th green from the TV tower just before the Outback Steakhouse Pro Am tournament. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

under Buck Buckner from 1995-98 and got to watch another modern legend, Tiger Woods, hone his game and play “fun” golf with buddy Mark O’Meara. Says Kubel, “It was fun to meet some of these golfing legends and nice that they remembered you, but you have to keep all that fame and glory in perspective and remember that they are really just normal folks like you and me.”

Kubel says he loves the energy and action of tournament preparations. He also has a passion for taking seriously the role of environmental steward. Kubel says, “It’s not hard! Like anything, if you work smart and have a plan, it just becomes your normal operating routine. Adopting IPM strategies and following BMPs isn’t rocket science, most of it is basic good housekeeping. Keeping good records and keeping the shop neat and clean sets an example for your staff, visitors and regulators. It’s scary when you go somewhere and see 6-foot-high dog

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fennel weeds growing in the junkpile out behind some shops.”

Maybe you could call it good turf housekeeping, but Kubel says paying attention to the turf daily also pays off environmentally.

“By following consistent monitoring, mapping and scouting practices we have been able to save the club money and minimize inputs to the golf course. One thing we do is keep the practice area as our control area. We don’t do preventive applications on that area. It becomes our barometer to tell us when pests are emerging and signals us to take a harder look at our traditional hot spots for pest infestation. Once we see pests on the range, then we go out and spot-treat to make sure the turf is protected. It serves as our lightning rod.”

Agronomically, the TPC course is situated in low-lying lake and creek basins, so moisture control on the course is paramount to keep the



*Superintendent Jason Kubel and General Manager Brady Boyd work as team at the TPC at Tampa Bay Golf Club. Photo by Joel Jackson.*



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*Aquatic plantings and tall 4-5 inch St. Augustine roughs buffer the lake on the par-3, 17th hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

***Learning the land and how it responds is one of the tools a superintendent uses to maximize the budget and minimize turf damage. That's why he stresses good record keeping and mapping of problem areas.***

turf healthy and playing conditions manageable. Hence weather is monitored closely every day, and watering cycles are based on ET demand and data from moisture meter readings. Deep and infrequent irrigation is the rule.

Two continuing projects occupy any available spare time. One is reconstruction of the bunkers in three-year phases. The greens were done from 2003 to 2006 and the fairway bunker complexes are next. Kubel says,

“It has been a long process but it has paid off. In the past after a severe thunderstorm it might take two weeks to repair all the bunker washouts. Now it might take two days. We have altered the subgrade slope of the bunkers, installed curtain drains at the top of the slope and improved interior drainage. The sand just doesn't move or get contaminated like it used to.”

The other long-range project is wetland restoration, which involves the removal of invasive plant material that has overtaken the wetlands. With the help of the Lake Masters Company, a program of chemical and mechanical removal has made great progress in opening up the understory in the wetlands so native cypress and ferns can proliferate. Wildlife habitat improvement and better air circulation are benefits along with the improved aesthetics.

Kubel believes success of long-range projects like these along with efficient and practical turf management programs benefit from having a superintendent on board with some tenure. Learning the land and how it responds is one of the tools a superintendent uses to maximize the budget and minimize turf damage. That's why he stresses good record

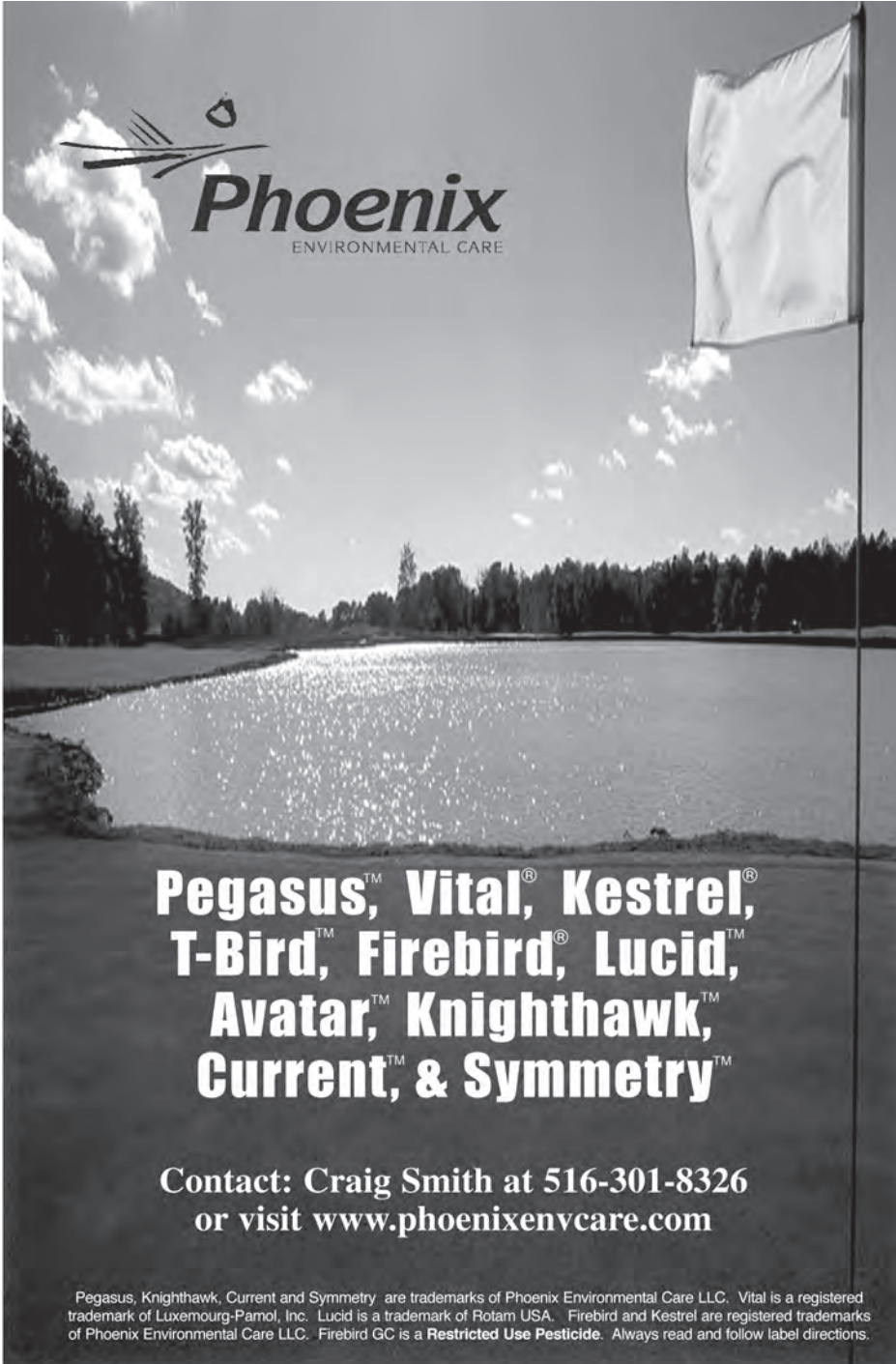

keeping and mapping of problem areas.

On the 152 acres of maintained turf on the course, Kubel treats only about 50 acres per year with a product like Curfew when warranted for nematode, mole cricket and grub control. He said they sometimes have been able to get three years' control in some areas, which helps reduce the total amount used on the course overall.

"Today we have to be very aware and sensitive to our role in the environment. We are under the proverbial microscope and we can all use a little common sense to improve our position in the public eye. For instance, ants sometimes become a problem on the putting surfaces. Rather than treat the whole green, we just make a perimeter pass around the green with some Top Choice and we have solved the problem while using less product which is good for the budget's bottom line and good for the environment."

But Kubel, like many other turf professionals, gets frustrated sometimes with the hypocrisy of regulatory concerns over golf in relation to environmental issues. He said, "Recently I had to fight tooth and nail to keep from having our consumptive use permit reduced from 101 acres to 60 acres. They said our roughs weren't revenue producing acres and we were wasting water. Meanwhile there are eight houses on my street and four of them are watering their yards in the rain."

But Kubel has been making TPC



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*Morning view of the 456-yard, par-4, 18th hole from behind the green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*



*Audubon Scrapbook informs members and guests of environmental stewardship. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

good for the environment ever since he arrived four and a half years ago. The course has been certified in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program since 1997 and it was re-certified on Kubel's watch. Besides the 2005 and 2006 ELGA awards, Kubel has made it a point to engage residents and local school kids in the efforts taking place on the course.

He writes newsletter articles on practical lawn care and irrigation tips for the residents. The kids have constructed many of the bird nesting boxes seen on the course. Golfers are kept aware of the course wildlife and environmental activities through newsletter articles and the Audubon Scrapbook in the lobby of the clubhouse – thanks to the scrapbooking talents of his administrative assistant Kathy Amick.

Besides Amick, Kubel has high

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**SUPERINTENDENT FACTS**



*Kubel briefs PGA Tour office on Outback tournament-prep progress. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

**Jason Kubel**

**Membership:** Class A, GCSAA

**From:** Daytona Beach, FL

**Family:** Wife Marcy; two daughters Ashley (8) and Brooke (6) and son Austin (2)

**Education:** A.S. Golf Course Operations, Lake City Community College 1994

**Employment:** 2002-Present, GCS TPC Tampa Bay; 2002 GCS, Cypress Head, Port Orange; 2000-01 GCS, The King & The Bear, St. Augustine; 1998-2000 GCS Baytree National GC, Melbourne; 1995-1998, AS, Isleworth G&CC, Windermere; 1994-95, Second AS LPGA International, Daytona Beach; 1993, Intern Doral Resort, Miami; 1992, Intern, Cypress Head GC, Port Orange; 1988-91 Foreman, Oceanside G&CC, Ormond Beach.

**Professional Affiliations & Awards:** Class A member of the GCSAA since 1991; Florida West Coast GCSA – board member past two years. Winner of GCSAA/Golf Digest ELGA Chaper Award for Public Courses in 2005 and 2006.

**Memorable moments:** Getting to know and work with the legendary Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus during the construction and grow-in of The King and The Bear course.

**Hobbies:** Offshore fishing, cooking, tennis, family vacations.

praise for his entire staff. He said, "Our team demonstrates commitment and loyalty on a daily basis as they go about their assignments. I can't thank them enough for the services they provide."

Teamwork is obviously a key part of the TPC culture as General Manager Brady Boyd had his own praise for Kubel's leadership and management style. Boyd said, "We're very proud of Jason and the job he's done the past four and a half years. Much of what he's accomplished is "underground" and isn't always immediately obvious, but we see the end result and overall improvements to the course. His leadership style has his department more involved and engaged in club and network activities and he has reduced the turnover rate in maintenance tremendously. I often say he's the best hire I ever made."

Once upon a time Kubel had aspirations to be an architect. In seeking some part time work, a friend mentioned a possible "cart boy" job at a nearby golf club that he thought would offer great tips and a work schedule that would fit his school schedule. When he applied the only position open was in golf course maintenance. He got the job and never quit. He ended up with his AS degree from Lake City.

Currently in his mid-30s, Kubel says one of his goals is to retire at age 50. When asked what he would do if he retired from golf he said, "Well, I love to cook!" That makes sense coming from a guy who wrote that he stays home to watch the Food Channel cooking shows. Look out Emeril!

The life and career path of a superintendent often means changing jobs and locations as you move up the ladder from assistant to head superintendent. Kubel says his biggest supporter has been his wife, Marcy. He said, "It takes a special person to commit to a relationship with someone in this industry. I wouldn't have made it this far without her."

Another important relationship is volunteering time to his local superintendent chapter. Kubel is currently serving on the Florida West



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## Fun Facts

### Jason's Stats

**Vehicle:** 2000 Dodge Ram, 4x4

**Last good movie I saw:** Outlaw Josie Wales, or any 007 movie

**I stay home to watch:** Cooking shows

**The book I've been reading:** Current events & research in trade magazines

**Favorite meal:** Ahi tuna on beansprouts with wasabi sauce and onion rings

**Favorite performers:** Clint Eastwood, AC/DC, Kenny Chesney, Jimmy Buffet, Neil Young, Brooke

Burns, Rolling Stones, and Aerosmith

**Prized possessions:** My children and the WWII memorial on our wall showing my grandfather receiving the Bronze Star Medal from General George Patton.

**Personal Heroes:** My wife Marcy. How she tolerates me I'll never know. She's the best

**Nobody knows that I:** Passed up an opportunity to caddy for Jack Nicklaus

**The one thing I can't stand:** Disrespect

**If I could do it over:** I'd do it again

**I'd give anything to meet:** Any of our U.S. Presidents

**If I could change one thing about myself:** Learn to be more patient  
My most irrational act: Losing my patience

**Most humbling experience:** The births of all of my children

**The words that best describe me:** Outgoing and straightforward

**My best fish story:** You should have seen the one that got away

**My most lucky golf shot:** All my shots are lucky

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*Close up of the approach to the Par 5, 12th hole from the layup position. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

**... one of the lessons learned from those mentors was, 'Don't let the new technologies get in the way of the basics. Keep it simple and practical.'**

Coast GCSA's board. His responsibility is meeting planning and education. He often calls on former meeting chairman Duane VanEtten for backup when he needs a helping hand. Kubel admits that his volunteer duties are the last thing on his daily agenda. But Kubel also recognizes the value of the time spent on chapter business.

"Last year," he said, "I was in charge of the newsletter. It wasn't easy for me. I don't consider writing one of my best skills. But by having this responsibility it forced me to become better and now I am writing articles for our club newsletter, and case studies and applications for the GCSAA ELGA Awards and our ACSP certification requirements. It has been rewarding personally and professionally to be involved."

If Kubel has any regrets so far in his career it was the time he declined the

opportunity to caddy for Jack Nicklaus when he was paired with Arnold Palmer at the Liberty Mutual Legends of Golf at the World Golf Village. He followed the group but let his boss at the time, Steve LaFrance, have the honor. During the round, Palmer was lining up a putt and asked Kubel, outside the ropes which way the putt broke. Kubel asked, "Is it legal for me to tell?"

Kubel says if you're not having fun doing what you do then it's time for a change. He credits all of the superintendents he's worked for with contributing to his success. He said, "They each have played the role of a mentor and more importantly as a friend." He added that one of the lessons learned from those mentors was, "Don't let the new technologies get in the way of the basics. Keep it simple and practical."

# *Congratulations*

*Jason Kubel and his club for being selected  
by the Florida West Coast GCSA as the  
Spring 2007 Florida Green Cover Story.*



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