



Wayne Otto, CGCS.

Remembering the “Wee One”

Wayne Otto, CGCS was a leader in our industry. Can people love grass? This has always been a question that has eluded me. I now think the question has been answered. Wayne Otto did love grass. But more than that, he loved the people who loved grass. Wayne was unique. The minute you met him, you made a friend. He spent most of his life on golf courses until his passing on October 21, 2004. A smile would come on his face as soon as the subject of golf or golf courses entered the conversation.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has a code of ethics. Anyone who knew Wayne didn't have to read it . . . all you had to do was emulate him. Wayne was the first to be certified in Wisconsin. It was important to Wayne that every superintendent was viewed and treated as a professional. He never hesitated to be a part of the future of this great profession. He was determined to make it grow.

Wayne was a pioneer. The industry has spent millions to give superintendents the tools to produce turf that Wayne Otto was able to give the members of Ozaukee Country Club 30 years ago. Wayne was the first to use sand topdressing. He knew what the rest of us learned later; it is the answer to consistently smooth golf greens. He had fast greens before championships, bedknives before growth regulation.

Wayne was one of the first to realize how important it is to be an environmental steward and enthusiastically join the Audubon Program and be certified.

Wayne was president of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association from 1977-1978. If Wayne could help a fellow superintendent or student, he was quick to be there to share his experience and knowledge. It didn't matter if you were at a nine-hole golf course or a big-buck country club. He treated you as an equal. He rejoiced in your success and shared in your disappointments.

What did Wayne like? Three answers:

Number 1: Golf

Number 2: Golf

Number 3: Golf

He liked and looked forward to his golf trips around the national with Rod Johnson, Chad Ball and Paul Bastron. He enjoyed playing GCSAA tournaments. It gave him the opportunity to meet superintendents and make new friends. He liked tacos and Mexican food; the hotter, the better. More than two days with Wayne, you were going to Conejito's, a Mexican restaurant in Milwaukee.

He liked Penn State. He was always proud of and grateful for the opportunity to be a graduate and to bond with the Penn State program. Wayne also liked Nebraska football and the Green Bay Packers.

Wayne enjoyed his retirement and his chance to be with superintendents through his work with Brookside Labs and Milorganite.

He loved his wife, JoAnn, who brought fulfillment into his life and who gave him love and purpose. She showed him, through travel, a world he would not have seen otherwise. He enjoyed their home and his life at home. Wayne liked to just go outside in his backyard and be creative. Together, they had a beautiful home inside and out. Wayne enjoyed being with Erik, JoAnn's son, and was proud of Erik's achievements as a golf course superintendent. He enjoyed being with his grandchildren.

Wayne enjoyed coauthoring the book, *Turfgrass Management: Tools and Techniques*. It was his opportunity to share with others, especially young people who followed in his footsteps and entered the profession he loved.

So why do we call him “Wee One”? When Wayne was in Scotland with Pat O'Brien, Stan Zontek and me, while playing St. Andrews, the caddies were walking ahead of us, making bets. One of the caddies said, “I'm putting my money on the wee one.” Many of us close to Wayne promised him before his death that his name would live on in this profession. Hence, the Wee One Foundation was established to help superintendents and their immediate families who face catastrophic illness without adequate insurance.

Wayne Otto, CGCS had a great peace and was grateful to all who were his friends. And his friends are grateful for the friendship he returned. Let Wayne Otto, CGCS, the Wee One, be ever remembered as a giant in our profession.

