A photograph of a golf course. In the foreground, a green fairway leads to a sand trap on the right. A path winds through the middle ground. The background is filled with tall, thin trees, some with bare branches and some with green needles. The sky is bright and overcast.

Keeping the memory alive

GCI's Monroe Miller talks with Rod Johnson about the growth of the Wee One Foundation and keeping Wayne Otto's legacy alive. *by Monroe S. Miller*

ALL PHOTOS BY JEFF KERNEN



“We raised \$40,000 for him and when we gave him the check he said, ‘Oh my.’ He died shortly after that, on October 21.”

— Rod Johnson

On the professional level, we have many examples in the world of golf and golf turf management of what can be done to honor exceptional individuals and their exceptional contributions. We can think of the Col. John Morley DSA Award, the O. J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Educational Facility, the Old Tom Morris Award, the J. R. Love Scholarship, the Musser Award and the Watson Fellowship. These accolades were all named to honor an individual who had contributed so much, who inspired and who we don't want to forget.

Every once in a while a person comes along whose life and work affect people around him so significantly they are inspired to find a way, when he leaves us,

to never let his legacy be forgotten. They look for a method or a vehicle to honor him that is as unique as the individual was and his contributions were. The most effective way to keep his life before an audience is to provide support that is both valuable and not available by any another group.

So it is with the Wee One Foundation, created by a small cadre of close friend to help ensure that the life and work and ways of Wayne Otto are not forgotten anytime soon. The Wee One is so special because the funds generated are turned around and given to superintendents and their families who have experienced catastrophic and expensive health problems. It helps those in need of financial support because of that illness



Rod Johnson and Wayne Otto together at a course celebration.

or accident. The namesake and the mission make the Wee One a singular organization in our world of turf.

Except for seven years spent in Nebraska (1960 – 1967) as a golf course superintendent, Wayne's

life and career were in Wisconsin. He was the superintendent at Ozaukee Country Club, a course that bordered the farm he grew up on, for 35 years. He worked on the crew for two years after an Army Reserves stint, gradu-

MORE where it matters most.

From tee to green, trust Nufarm to give you more performance and value for your maintenance dollar.

MORE CONFIDENCE

Clover, thistle and hundreds of other tough weeds melt away with Millennium™ Ultra².



Nufarm
Propiconazole SPC

Nufarm
T-Methyl SPC

Nufarm
TM+IP SPC

ated from Penn State's two-year program in 1960 and started his long career.

Playing conditions at Ozaukee were always excellent and Wayne was never hesitant to discuss – usually at some length – what programs were working and which ones weren't as successful. I always viewed him as an outstanding plantsman and that trait, coupled with his keen sense of observation, put him on a different level in the golf turf industry. It always seemed he knew more about the successful culture of *Poa annua* than anyone else I knew.

Ozaukee was the first golf course in the country to attain certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for golf courses, as I discovered from a display while visiting

the World Golf Hall of Fame in Florida. He was out in front of everyone in adopting what has become a widespread and successful program.

Leadership is a characteristic that came easily to Wayne Otto. He did more than his share in our professional organizations, serving as president of the Midwest Regional Turf Foundation and the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association. He was a director of the O. J. Noer Research Foundation, a member of the USGA Green Section Committee, and a board member of the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association. He was a willing speaker, offered his golf course for UW Extension research and studies, and never missed educational opportunities. At seminars you could usually find him in the

front row somewhere. And you could count on him to ask speakers some really good questions, sometimes the ones no one else would ask.

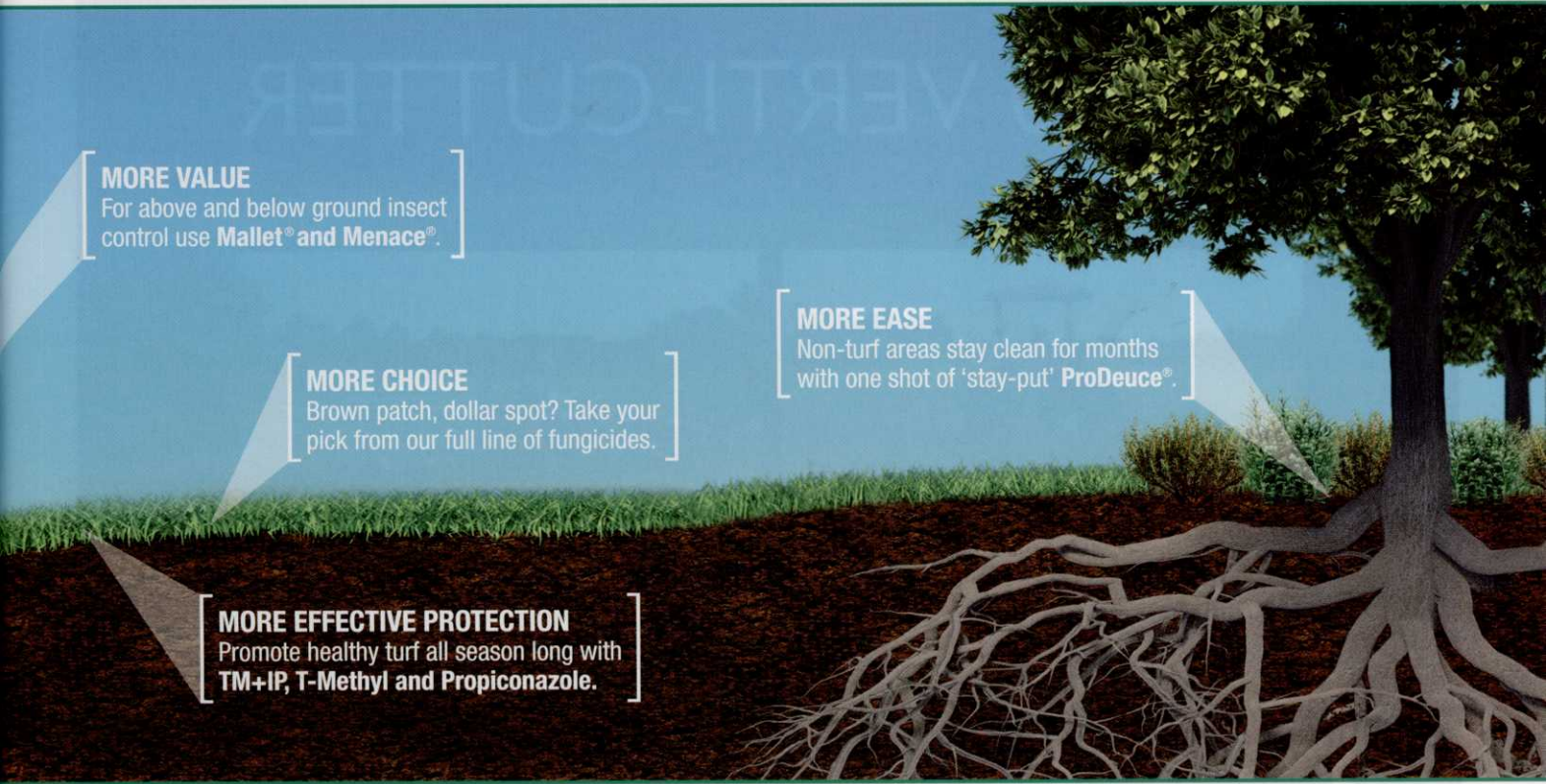
Wayne was one of the first to recognize the GCSAA's CGCS program and was one of the superintendents to be certified early in the program.

He loved to play golf, and was a student of golf course architecture. But it was golf course management that most interested him. Anyone who knew him greatly appreciated his ability to talk to anybody. And when he spoke, people listened. I remember one GIS when I decided I was going to tour the equipment show with him. That didn't last long; he'd go six feet and stop to visit with somebody who wanted to talk with him. I doubt he ever

made it completely through the show floor. I was amazed that one superintendent could know so many people in golf turf from all across the country.

He retired in November 2002. On the 12th of November we held a retirement party for him. Steve Mona traveled to Wisconsin from GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, Kan., Stan Zontek flew in from Philadelphia, and Club Car's CEO Phil Trailles came up from Augusta, Ga. It was a real honor for me to present Wayne our WGCSA DSA the next morning at the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium. That meeting was one that Wayne had helped plan each year for a quarter of a century.

Wayne retired from the golf course, but kept his finger in the golf turf business. He did some



MORE VALUE
For above and below ground insect control use **Mallet®** and **Menace®**.

MORE CHOICE
Brown patch, dollar spot? Take your pick from our full line of fungicides.

MORE EASE
Non-turf areas stay clean for months with one shot of 'stay-put' **ProDeuce®**.

MORE EFFECTIVE PROTECTION
Promote healthy turf all season long with **TM+IP, T-Methyl** and **Propiconazole**.

Collaborate. Create. Succeed.
www.nufarm.com/usto 1-800-808-008

©2012 Nufarm. Important: Always read and follow label instructions. Mallet®, Menace®, Millennium™ and ProDeuce® are trademarks of Nufarm.





Johnson hangs this photo of Otto and his dog, Max, in his office to keep Otto's memory alive daily.

part-time work for Milorganite, represented Brookside Labs and established "Turfgrass Support Services," a consulting business. We saw him out and about, at meetings and in the field. Although it was no surprise to those who knew him, he took the time to become an author. He collaborated with his good friend Danny Quast to write *Turf Management Tools and Techniques*, a turf text in which they shared their years of experience. Few among us have the knowledge or skill to write that book.

Then he got sick, very sick. Pancreatic cancer took him from us on Oct. 21, 2004. People were greatly affected by his death, upset over how unfair it was for such a great man to experience such a fate. His death inspired the creation of the Wee One, and his best friend, Rod Johnson was there when it was organized. Rod is the golf course superintendent at Pine Hills CC in Sheboygan, Wis., and tells what has happened and

where the foundation is headed in the years to come.

Who was present for your first Wee One meeting?

Well, we started to raise money for Wayne's medical expenses before we were formally the Wee One Foundation. We organized a golf outing at my course – Pine Hills – and held it on Sept. 22, 2004. Wayne was still alive, but very ill. He sprung himself from the hospital despite a very recent stroke, and he stayed with us the whole day, as difficult as it was for him. We raised \$40,000 for him and when we gave him the check he said, "Oh my." He died shortly after that, on October 21.

Who organized this outing?

Mike Handrich, Danny Quast, Beverly Quast, Paul Bastron, Pat Sisk, Chad Ball, Dave Radaj, Mark Petitgoue and myself.

VC-60 VERTI-CUTTER

SUCCESS FOR YOUR TURF



- Hardened or carbide tip blades
- Up to 1 1/2 inches deep
- Belt Driven
- Patented swing hitch
- 2 inch spacing
- Quick pin depth adjustment

800-363-8780 | www.1stproducts.com

What happened after this outing?

We got together and decided we wanted to formalize our group, which now included Wayne's widow JoAnn, as well as Beverly Quast, under the 501c3 administrative format and operate as a tribute to Wayne. It was Bill Roberts, past GCSAA president, who rightly noted, "Health issues like Wayne's will keep happening. We need to do something."

We met at Wayne's favorite Mexican restaurant in Milwaukee – it was at a midpoint between Sheboygan and Chicago. We wrote by-laws and benevolence SOP – who will be eligible for help and what criteria will be applied to select a recipient.

How was the name "Wee One" chosen?

Pat Sisk knew the Wee One story, and Danny was actually present when the Wee One story happened. Stan Zontek, Patrick O'Brien, Danny Quast and Wayne Otto were in Scotland on a golf trip. At one course they had gathered with the caddies and were lining up their bets, which at this course included caddies and side bets. One caddy, in reference to Wayne, said, "My money's on the wee one."

Did Wayne live long enough to know about your efforts through this foundation?

I never told Wayne, but Danny was able to tell him before he passed. He was at his home where he was confined.

Obviously you and Wayne had a great friendship despite



The group supports turf professionals with health issues.

the differences in your ages. When did it all begin?

I was working at North Hills Country Club and I was sent to Ozaukee Country Club on an errand. It should have taken a few minutes, but I was there all afternoon! Shortly after I was named superintendent at Pine Hills. The two clubs had a relationship in golf – it was actually called the Pinezaukee League – and that helped us get to know one

another. We roomed together at the first NCTE conference in Arlington, Ill., and ate Mexican food for the first time in each other's company.

Did you spend a lot of time with Wayne near the end of his life?

I did, as many of his friends did. Most of it was in his house; we watched a lot of sports in the master bedroom, usually avoiding the "elephant in the room." But not once did he ever say, "Why me?" His attitude was, "I know my fate; you don't."

Did you ever dream the Wee One would grow as it has in these relatively few years?

Never. I was afraid we would see interest dwindle in a couple of years, but after six months or

MORE confidence.

Make Mallet® Insecticide the cornerstone of your preventive grub control program and know you're using the right product for the job. Imidacloprid, the active ingredient in Mallet, is the proven industry leader in grub control. You can be confident in Mallet's effectiveness and quality, and in its value to your course - another way Nufarm gives you more where it matters most.

More where it matters most.
www.nufarm.com/usto

©2012 Nufarm. Important: Always read and follow label instructions. Mallet® is a trademark of Nufarm.



THE CLEAR CHOICE



KPHITE® 7LP SYSTEMIC FUNGICIDE BACTERICIDE

KPHITE 7LP Systemic Fungicide Bactericide is proven effective against pythium, dollar spot, brown patch and fungal diseases. KPHITE is EPA labeled, pH neutral and is uniquely formulated to increase plant health and vigor.



TO FIND A DISTRIBUTOR
OR LEARN MORE
WWW.PLANTFOODSYSTEMS.COM
800.343.7775

Q&A

so I knew it would continue on. We've been working with it long enough that the majority of our members never knew Wayne. The mission of the Wee One has tremendous appeal to people.

You grew quickly enough that you enlisted professional help to run the organization. How has that worked out?

Great. Initially, we wanted a fundraiser, but Luke Cella was a great administrator. He's looking to move more to the fundraising role and we are really happy for that. We need to even out the peaks and valleys in our funding.

I know that Pine Hills has hosted a Wee One tournament every year. The event is legendary in terms of the number of participants, money raised and the good times had. Have you expanded beyond your own golf course?

We have. There is a Wee One event in Virginia that is heading into its fifth season. Minnesota has had two, with a third coming. Michigan has also had two events with an excellent event last year at Oakland hills in Michigan and has an event planned for this year at Country Club of Detroit.

Regarding benevolence, has that effort reached nationwide status?

We have made donations to superintendents in 19 states, from the East Coast to the West Coast and as far south as Texas. We have generated \$480,000 in the existence of the Wee One, and we will go beyond \$500,000 sometime this July.

What's in the future for the Wee One Foundation?

The officers and directors want to build on our success and we are developing plans for an endowment that will secure the organization's mission well into the future. We need to continue to grow because there is more need than new members. **GCI**

Monroe Miller is a frequent contributor to GCI, including the column, "The Monroe Doctrine."

More thoughts on Wayne

Dr. Frank Rossi, Extension Professor of Turfgrass Science at Cornell University, developed a relationship with Wayne Otto during his years on the faculty at Wisconsin. He spoke of Otto in terms of "Wayne's World." This world was one of innovation, passion for golf turf and a keen sense of the practical. Rossi recalls a conversation with Wayne about his fertility program. "Wayne said the key to good greens is to put a padlock on the fertilizer shed after May 1." After Wayne's death, Rossi lamented he couldn't imagine the golf turf world without Wayne Otto.

"Wayne was the best grass grower that I've ever met," says Danny Quast, former superintendent at Milwaukee CC and Medina CC. "He had the best looking and fastest greens and the best fairways." Quast, a 2004 GCSAA DSA recipient, calls Otto a great friend. "Everybody who met Wayne liked him. He was well-renowned and well-respected all over the country." That fact may explain a lot of the success of the Wee One.

Mike Handrich, superintendent of Racine CC, recalls when he was a young and inexperienced superintendent and needed some advice, he'd call Wayne Otto for help, and Wayne would come right away. "Wayne was a true pioneer of our industry, and he was never afraid to take chances to find a better method or way of accomplishing something. We continue to reap the benefits from his curiosity and innovation today," says Handrich.