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STANLEY J. ZONTEK

The recent passing of Stan hit me harder than I had expected. Shortly after being introduced to him by my mentor, Dr. Peter Dernoeden, I had formed one my greatest friendships. Whether it was drinking a pint, finding a job or traveling the world; Stan was always there for me.

IN THE BEGINNING. I actually don't remember the first time I met Stan. I am pretty sure it was as a Penn State undergraduate student. However, it wasn't until my graduate school days at the University of Maryland that Stan and I started to really bond. My research project was funded by the USGA and Stan would often stop in to find out the latest information about bentgrass dead spot infection.

During his visits to numerous courses in the mid-Atlantic region, Stan would often call me to report suspected outbreaks of the disease and inquire about the latest control measures to help solve the problem.

It was during my years at Maryland when I realized two things. One, how much Stan really liked helping golf course superintendents. The other, how much information Stan actually stored in his head. He never seemed to forget anything.

As a Master of Science student, my intentions were to complete my degree and go back into the work force on a path to becoming a superintendent or possibly an agronomist for the USGA. Stan saw this passion and encouraged me to apply for the USGA internship program. When I got the internship, I assumed that I would be traveling for the week with Stan, but he had other plans.

FORGING RELATIONSHIPS. Stan was all about relationship building and my internship would be no different. Instead of having me travel with him, he arranged for me to split my time during that week with Keith Happ in Pittsburgh and Darin Bevard in Maryland. After that week, I had increased my network and friendships by two.

After completing my Ph.D. in 2004, I took my first position in academia at UCONN. Knowing that I wasn't familiar with New England, Stan immediately stepped in and put me in touch with

the regional USGA agronomists in the Northeast. Shortly after my arrival, Jim Skolurski invited me to travel to regional golf courses with him to get the lay of the land and meet some regional superintendents.

Again, more friendships were made.

CAREER SUPPORT. Stan's support of my career continued during my time at UCONN and I have to admit he was influential in my return to Penn State. I spoke with him on numerous occasions about the tough decision I was facing and although I knew he wanted me to go back to Penn State, he would never offer that advice directly. It wasn't until after I made my decision that he shared his true feelings.

Although Stan will not make the trip back to St. Andrews that we were planning for next spring, you can rest assured that pints will be raised and flowers delivered.

Even after I accepted the position, Stan continued to be influential in my career. He was very well respected by the faculty and administration at Penn State and was awarded the 2007 Outstanding Alumni Award from our department. When it came time to ask for letters of recommendation for my tenure, he once again volunteered to assist. When I was granted tenure, Stan was one of the first to call and congratulate me on the achievement.

TRAVELING WITH STAN. In addition to all of the local career support that Stan had provided me over the years, it was perhaps his inclusion of me in his overseas trips that had the greatest influence. Stan is well-known for his travels around the world and particularly his infamous trips to St. Andrews.

For years I heard about the great times he had spent with various greenkeepers in the region including those at Loch Lomond, St. Andrews, Castle Stuart and many more. Even more impor-

tant to him were the stories and relationships that he built with those not affiliated with golf or turfgrass.

One of those relationships was with the owners and staff at his favorite hotel in St. Andrews – The Russell. In 2007, I had my first introduction to exactly what this meant when he invited me to travel with him to the “Home of Golf.” He was a meticulous planner and expert host of trips. Anytime you traveled with Stan he oversaw every detail, which allowed his traveling companions the ability to sit back and just take it all in. Upon our arrival in St. Andrews and The Russell, we were personally greeted by Helen (the manager) and a quick pint at the bar.

The next day, the first order of business was to head to the local florist (Jamie’s) and purchase flowers for the “ladies of The Russell.” Whether it was bringing flowers to his friends at The Russell or sending random packages of Twizzlers to the staff of BIGGA, Stan always thought of others.

Dr. Kim Erusha sums it up the best: “Stanley often said this was a people business and it was about building relationships.”

UNDERSTANDING STAN’S INFLUENCE. Between 2007 and 2010 I made five trips with Stan to the UK. During that time, I was a sponge. I took in as much as I could and often just sat back and watched Stan hold court with numerous people on each trip. I don’t really believe I fully understood the impact Stan had on exposing me to St. Andrews until I took my first trip there without him this past July.

Although I wasn’t able to get a room at The Russell (there was a national Saxophone Congress in town), numerous Greenkeepers stepped in to find us accommodations. Arrangements for talks were made and even a round of golf at the Old Course. Despite not staying at Stan’s favorite hotel, I did stop in to say hello and was greeted by that same warm welcome from Helen and the staff as I had been during my first visit 5 years prior. It was then that I realized all that Stan had actually done for me.

After hearing about Stan’s death on that Tuesday morning, one of my first calls was to Andy Campbell, one of his closest friends at St. Andrews. Since then I have shared numerous emails with Andy, Helen and his many friends in that part of the world. It doesn’t matter where you live or how you knew Stan, it is clear that he had a large impact on many people’s lives.

SAYING GOODBYE. Although Stan will not accompany me when I make the trip back to St. Andrews next spring, you can rest assured that pints will be raised and flowers delivered. I may even have a fudgy donut or two in his honor.

Stan, I can count the number of people who have greatly influenced my life on one hand and you definitely make that list. I cannot thank you enough for all that you’ve done for me. I will miss you and will do my best to carry on some of the traditions that you started and shared with me over the years. Go Golf! **GCI**



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ALUMNI UPDATE

“Two ideas had an immediate impact on me and our facility.

The first was from Dan Meersman of the Philadelphia Cricket Club. He incorporated a ‘meet-and-greet’ into his weekly or daily activities. He would bring members into his maintenance facility and let them express their thoughts on the conditioning of the course. This allowed his team to be able to identify with the members’ concerns and the members to get face time with his team. I immediately incorporated that into our regime. The other idea was hearing Steve Drake talk about blogs and how they can be utilized as another avenue of communication. After Steve’s discussion, other attendees chimed in on their experience and I was able to see the value of having this tool. After getting back from the SBI, I immediately created a blog and started posting. The response was phenomenal!”



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