

Walter Mattison was not one of the profession's high-profile movers and shakers. He never hosted a Major. He didn't pioneer any revolutionary turf techniques. He wasn't even one of those studs who turns up in magazine ads endorsing some new potion or gadget.

But until his untimely death just before Christmas, Walter was a fine man, a good husband, a caring father, a friend to all and, in many ways, a prototype for everything that's right about this profession.

I first met Walter the day I broke my neck. It was 1989 and my wife and I were on a second honeymoon in Maui. On the first day there, our plans for a leisurely time at the beach and a round of golf at Makena GC — where Walter was superintendent — were rudely interrupted when my clumsy attempt at bodysurfing ended with a trip to the emergency room. It turned out I'd managed to crack a vertebra. Fortunately, I was neither dead nor paralyzed, but I was sentenced to spend the rest of the vacation on my back wearing a major-league neck brace and stoned out of my gourd on pain killers.

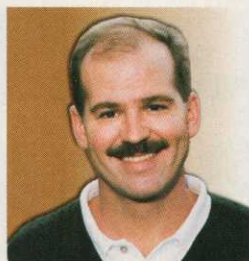
Then along came Walter, who I'd only talked with briefly on the phone before the trip. After my wife left him a message apologizing for missing our golf date with him, he called, he sent flowers and he checked in daily to make sure everything was OK. His concern for someone he hardly knew was the highlight of an otherwise crappy trip. My wife's comment about Walter was, "If all superintendents are like that, I can see why you love your work so much."

Fast forward 10 years to the launch of *Golfdom* at the GCSAA Show in Orlando. The first person I see at the conference is Walter. After big bear hugs and a couple of beers, I quickly drafted Walter to be on the *Golfdom* Advisory Staff (our team of editorial reviewers). He soon became the conscience of the magazine, always urging us to do positive stories, but to keep "telling it like it is." Even as his illness progressed, he continued to offer constructive criticism and other ideas.

Over the past year, Walter's fight against the tumor that eventually claimed his life was an inspiration to friends and colleagues in Oregon

A Farewell, But Not A Goodbye

BY PAT JONES



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and around the world. A request for superintendents to send him flags from their courses to cheer him up resulted in hundreds of responses (and a personal phone call from Arnold Palmer). A fund-raising effort has netted more than \$70,000 to support his family. A network of friends kept us posted on his condition up to the end.

Why did Walter's life and death touch so many of us so deeply? In part, it's because Walter represented so much that's remarkable about this profession. He helped others without expecting anything in return. He radiated friendship and a positive attitude. He loved working the land and bringing a course to life.

But I think you also have to look beyond his professional life to see why Walter was special: He was, quite simply, a good man who happened to be a superintendent. We were lucky to have him.

This is our farewell to Walter, but we're not saying goodbye. We've decided to continue to list his name on the *Golfdom* Advisory Staff roster that appears in every issue for as long as we publish this magazine. It's our hope that Walter's spirit will always live on in these pages.

Another happier farewell goes to Joe O'Brien, GCSAA's longtime chief operating officer who's off to seek new challenges after seven years on the association's executive team. His ability to dig through complex issues and get to the heart of the matter will be missed those who had the pleasure of working with him. After more than 25 combined years with PGA of America and GCSAA, Joe possesses a global perspective on the golf business that few can match. Thanks for everything, Joe.

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