

**L**egend has it that Wayne Otto got his nickname, “The Wee One,” on the first tee of the hallowed grounds of The Old Course at St. Andrews. Wayne was ready to tee off with fellow superintendent Danny Quast and Stan Zontek and Pat O’Brien of the USGA Green Section. Even in that auspicious place, the four were engaged in the usual pre-round banter about what stakes they would play for, when one of their craggy local caddies was heard to tell another in a deep Scots brogue, “My money’s on the wee one.”

Wayne, who died last month at age 65 after a valiant battle with cancer, was “wee” in stature but a giant in spirit. He was a fixture in the Wisconsin golf community for five decades and one of those all-too-rare superintendents who actually retired from Ozaukee Country Club after 35 years. In retirement, and fighting the ticking clock of cancer, he and Quast completed their marvelous book, *Golf Course Turf Management — Tools & Techniques*. Wayne is survived by his glorious wife, JoAnn, two children and four grandchildren.

The standard obituary ends there, because Wayne simply wasn’t a standard guy. The words “mirthful” and “turfhead” seem odd when put together, but Wayne was both. He was a barrel of fun to be around, but according to his many friends he would talk turf with anyone, anywhere and anytime. If you ever met Wayne at the GCSAA show or a golf tournament, you’re probably shaking your head in agreement right now. He was, quite simply, passionately intense about the art and science of growing grass.

“I can’t think of anybody who has talked more turf to more superintendents than Wayne,” says his longtime friend and partner-in-crime, Rod Johnson, certified superintendent of Pine Hills Country Club in Sheboygan, Wis. “While he supported everything that improved our professional standing, turf talk was always more important.”

He practiced what he preached in terms of agronomy. Marc Davison, certified super-

## Wee in Size, Otto Was Big in Heart

BY PAT JONES



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intendent of Green Bay Country Club, recalls Wayne’s lean and mean approach to fertilizing greens.

“He told me once that he just gave his greens a ‘sniff’ of nitrogen. He said he’d open a bag of fertilizer and drive around each green with the open bag in the back of his cart. Obviously, he was joking, but that was Wayne.”

He was also always right in the middle of practical jokes, but more often on the receiving end. Many of them often involved showerheads and toilet paper. Even though Wayne was incessantly zinged by Johnson and others, he never got mad and rarely retaliated. He just took pleasure in being part of the gag.

There are myriad other stories, many about Wayne’s insatiable appetite for Mexican food, hot sauce that would bulge the eyeballs of the strongest among us and Cushmans that mysteriously ended up in creeks during the night. But the constant theme of all the messages I received from his colleagues was the unconditional joy he radiated when he was on the course or amongst his friends.

Many will miss him and mourn, but all of us in this business should take a cue from Wayne and celebrate the fact that we were blessed to be a part of something that seems to attract such people. I’m wagering that Wayne is up in the Big Somewhere right now seeking out his fellow superintendents for a chat.

And who will win the inevitable heavenly arguments about turf? My money’s on the Wee One.

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