



A Guy You Can Count On

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

It was quite an honor for me to bestow quite an honor on Wayne Otto at the breakfast meeting at the Symposium last fall. I think I was asked because proximity gives me impartiality. Many of Wayne's friends in Milwaukee were simply too close to him and too fond of him to speak with the factual clarity required by an award like our WGCSA Distinguished Service Award. From my view a hundred miles away, for more than 30 years, I saw a man - a golf course superintendent - who could be counted on, regardless of the situation.

During his career, Otto embodied many many traits golf course superintendents all wish they had, me included. See if you recognize the same ones I have.

Wayne Otto's keen sense of observation rivals anyone's. I cannot count the times, in casual conversations or bull sessions, when he would comment on

something he'd noted. You could see those listening to him pause and consider what he was discussing. Especially perceptive were those thoughts about *Poa annua* and its prevalence and the most difficult aspects of its culture. He observed many things about growing turf on clay soils (Mequon gold, as he'd call it), various irrigation practices, TGRs, turfgrass fertility, and subtleties offered by golf's best architects over time. Honestly, he should write a book.

The perfect complement to his sharp sense of observation is Wayne's natural curiosity. Who do you know, other than Wayne Otto, who would jump the rope around a green at the Augusta National Golf Club during the Masters to cut the putting green turf with his pocket knife to see roots and root zone mix? And who, in the long history of the Wisconsin Golf Turf

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Symposium, has asked more questions of guest speakers than Wayne Otto? And his questions usually cut to the bone of an issue. Good superintendents always have lots of questions.

It is obvious that much of the success Otto has had in his 40-year career comes from the fact that he is an excellent plantsman. He has a clear understanding of how the biological systems on a golf course work and how they can be manipulated to provide better conditions for golf. Someone once joked that "he must have chlorophyll in his blood veins." It actually was a high compliment for Wayne!

For me one of his strongest traits as a golf course superintendent is his ability as an innovator, from sand topdressing to Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program certification - the first in Wisconsin. Last winter Chad Grimm and I drove to the GCSAA conference in Orlando. We stopped at the World Golf Hall of Fame in St. Augustine. We toured the Hall of Fame and were startled to see the display, a thousand miles from Wisconsin, that told the story in photos and narrative, of Wayne's activities with the Audubon program. I was really proud of the guy and impressed by his humility. Many would have bragged and blown about such recognition; not Otto. We had to learn about it on our own faraway from home.

I am among those many who think there is something special about a person who (1) stays in our profession from start to finish, and (2) manages a 30-plus year run at the same golf club. It shows that he was at the top of his game everyday, that he is adaptable, and

that he is able to keep pace with change. There are not many individuals in this arena.

Wayne Otto is a natural leader and has generously shared that ability with us. He's held all the offices of the WGCSA, including the presidency in 1977 and 1978. He has served on GCSAA committees forever, exceeded in time only by his services on the Symposium committee. He has been a director of the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association. This prominence has earned the respect of the leaders in our business; GCSAA CEO Steve Mona came to Wisconsin to be part of Wayne's retirement party at Pine Hills during the Symposium last fall.

Everyone who even knows him even slightly will tell you that Otto is open, honest and helpful. He has had a positive affect on many young golf course superintendents. And his contemporaries also seek his opinion and advice when faced with tough issues. He has no secrets.

Wayne Otto is the real deal, affable and friendly and happy with his work in golf course management. He's famous for his golf trips with Rod Johnson; he enjoys the game as a player, as a student of golf course architecture, and as one of the country's best keepers of the green.

The WGCSA Distinguished Service Award has only been awarded a dozen times since our founding in 1930. Wayne Otto is a perfect example of the kind of individual the award was designed to recognize.

Congratulations, Wayne. We are proud to count you among us. ♣

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