



Wayne's World

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Like most of you, as soon as I learned of Wayne Otto's illness I recalled the last time I saw him. Wayne, JoAnn and I were chatting away in the Wisconsin Room at the GCSAA Conference in San Diego, reveling in Monroe Miller's USGA Green Section Award and Dan Quast's GCSAA Distinguished Service Award.

Wayne seemed as thrilled for them as he would have been if he received the award himself. When I think about knowing Wayne I am reminded of the ordinary events and how he always enjoyed people's success and viewed things from a unique perspective. This was Wayne's World.

When I joined the faculty in Wisconsin in 1992, Wayne was one of the first superintendents I met. While Rod Johnson was challenging me to some golf, Wayne was asking me to do some research at his golf course. Not knowing him I assumed he was more interested in turf than golf, but I was mistaken. His passion for golf was equal to his passion for turf. Wayne's World was not predictable.

I recall visiting Ozaukee CC and touring the course with Wayne. He was informing me about his fertility program and how he felt he had "too much grass on his greens." "The key to good greens," Wayne stated, "is to put a padlock on the fertilizer shed after May 1." In fact, over the years Wayne would discuss with me how many guys he felt had too much grass on their greens. He'd say, "so and so has more grass on one green than I have on all of mine!" In Wayne's World he had an opinion on everything, but never had a closed mind on anything.

Of all the guys I have known over my career, Wayne was a guy I always looked forward to seeing and chatting with about the latest management trends. For an "mature" superintendent I was impressed by how much he was aware of the innovations superintendents were implementing. He would cite his sources as "so and so was doing such and such in Arizona" or "I was chatting with so and so in Connecticut or Nebraska and they are doing such and such." Wayne's World spanned the globe.

How did Wayne know all these guys? Even more amazing is how every one of them knew him and would smile when his name was mentioned. In fact, there was hardly a guy I met who didn't have a Wayne Otto story. I figured it was all a by-product of graduating from the Penn State Turf Program in like 1895! In Wayne's World he was the Forest Gump of golf course superintendents.

Wayne and I would often lament about how things had changed regarding education. My favorite Wayne suggestion was to try and resurrect the "walking tours" of golf courses. He told me that when

he was a superintendent in Nebraska, they used to wear suits and ties and walk around the host superintendent's course. In Wayne's World a good education mattered more than a free round of golf.

As I was writing this I began to realize I really did not know Wayne all that well. I knew very little about his likes and dislikes and even less about him personally, but up until now I thought I did. I felt comfortable in Wayne's World with his unassuming nature and engaging manner.

This year was tough on our industry. I was in State College, PA in July for George Hamilton's Memorial Service. Like Wayne, George had a unique perspective on golf turf management and like Wayne is gone too soon.

It won't be the same in the Wisconsin Room this year at the GCSAA Conference and I am sure the Symposium will feel Wayne's absence. I can't imagine the Wisconsin Golf Turf World without Wayne; it might be because his world and Wisconsin's were one and the same.

I'll miss you Wayne. 🌿

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