



Robert J. Otten – *Public Service*

The only child of Frederick and Florence Kern Otten, Bob was born on January 26, 1920, in Newark, NJ, and was graduated from Arts High School and the Parsons School of Design in New York City in 1942 majoring in interior and theatrical stage design. He was a professional member of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID).

Bob was a World War II veteran who served in the Army from 1943-46 as a member of the Air Corps Camouflage and Special Services Group stationed in Walterboro, SC.

Following his military service, Bob moved to Wheeling in 1946 becoming Oglebay Park's first drama director of theatrical productions. In 1950, Bob joined Stone & Thomas Department Stores in Charleston, WV, as its sales promotion director. In 1962, he returned to Wheeling assuming the duties of director of interior design for Stone & Thomas. During the Johnson presidential administration, at the request of the Rebehak Harkness Foundation, Bob constructed a scale model duplicating the portable stage of the East Room of the White House that was presented to Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson that now resides in the Johnson Memorial Library in Austin, TX. When he retired in 1983, he held the position of corporate vice president of sales promotions.

In retirement, his design talents shifted to Oglebay Park, influencing the design of many of the facilities within the park, with the Glass Museum being among his favorites. In 1985, he created the first of five initial displays in the park's Festival of Lights. Throughout his years with Oglebay, he created 50 festival displays including the official festival ornaments for the event's first 20 years. The Festival of Lights has attracted millions of visitors to Wheeling and Oglebay Park during the holiday season.

Bob Otten, in the eyes of many sports fans in the Ohio Valley, is best known and remembered as the founder of the Wheeling Amateur Hockey Association, established in 1964 with only seven youngsters.

Bob saw the league grow to 450 Wheeling area youth. In 1970, the Amateur Hockey Association gave Otten a special award for his work in the advancement of American amateur hockey. Today, high school hockey teams statewide vie for the Bob Otten Cup. Bill Van Horne, Wheeling News-Register sports editor and Wheeling Hall of Fame inductee, wrote: "Truth is that Wheeling might never have been considered for a professional franchise but for the reservoir of keen interest in the sport that has been nurtured through WAHA."

Otten played hockey as a teen-ager and tried out with the New York Rangers. It is not surprising that he was recruited by Thunderbird (now the Nailers) officials to organize the off-ice officials for Wheeling's entry into the East Coast Hockey League. Being a former referee-in-chief for the Mid-American District III US Amateur Hockey Association, and his connections with the NHL's Pittsburgh Penguins, were influential in Wheeling becoming an ECHL minor league hockey venue.

Bob was a Rotarian for more than half a century and served as president (1973-74), and in 1985, was named a Paul Harris Fellow of Rotary International. He was a recipient of numerous community service awards that included citizen of the month and distinguished service awards from the Wheeling Jaycees. He also served on advisory boards for the Wheeling Symphony, Belmont College, West Liberty State College, West Virginia Northern Community College, and Victorian Wheeling. Since 1946 he left a legacy of lifelong selfless dedication to the Wheeling community and of goodwill to all he met. It is said of Bob Otten that "he is a man who has contributed much to the betterment of his adopted city."

Bob Otten died on March 14, 2005, at the age of 85 in Wheeling.