

American Academy of Gold Foil Operators Distinguished Member Award

Dr Ralph Stenberg



Ralph Stenberg (right)

In May 1976, I was anxiously awaiting graduation from the University of Washington, School of Dentistry. Our senior class had been invited to attend the Associated Ferrier Study Clubs annual meeting. We were told that we might learn something about gold foil from the operating members. Since I needed all the help I could get for the impending Washington State Board, I gladly attended. As I peeked at an exquisite Class II foil, I read the name of the operator, Dr Ralph Stenberg, Hampson-Ferrier Gold Foil Study Club, Lynnwood, WA. Not only was the foil highly polished and extremely well condensed, all the adjacent restorations were polished and exquisite as well. I am sure that all of you who are attending this awards recognition have had an opportunity to see the outstanding foils that Ralph has finished at our annual meetings. He is truly deserving of our Academy's Distinguished Member award.

You may think that Ralph has "flown under the radar of dentistry." I can assure you that this is not the case. He is a 51-year member of the Hampson-Ferrier GFSC and our current mentor. He is a director on the board of the International Academy of Gnathology and a recipient of their McCollum Award. He is a member of The Academy of Restorative Dentistry, and The International and American College of Dentists. He has also mentored The Robert L Bruna Seminar in Bellingham (30 years), The Mount Baker Stenberg

Study Club, The Northwest Research Study Club and The Seattle Occlusion Study Club. He has also lectured and presented clinics in Europe, Mexico and Canada.

You might ask "how was the foundation laid" for such a distinguished career that still continues today? Ralph was born on a farm in Watford City, North Dakota. He is the tenth of eleven children. After a brief stay in Minneapolis, some of the family moved to Seattle. He graduated from Garfield High School and enlisted in the Navy Air Force. He was a radar operator, bombardier and gunner on a PBM, a two-engine submarine patrol aircraft equipped with depth charges, bombs and machine guns. He flew 150 missions over the Atlantic looking for submarines. He also flew weather reconnaissance, including flights into the eye of hurricanes. He used the GI Bill to complete his secondary education and, in 1954, he graduated "by the skin of my teeth" (his words) from the University of Washington School of Dentistry. With a new practice and no money, he accepted Jack Kiefer's invitation to attend the Stibbs two-week gold foil course. He said he has never regretted living on bread and water during the class. But he did admit that it took five years to vanquish the image of Gerry Stibbs at his shoulder every time he did a gold foil in the office.

Ralph is dedicated to dentistry, but he is even more dedicated to his wife, Phyllis, six children (four daughters/two sons), 18 grandchildren and one great-grandchild in Oslo, Norway. On his 70th birthday, all the children were present except for one. Even their youngest daughter had returned from 3½ years in Sweden. The family gathering at a local restaurant was interrupted by a phone call. Ralph, thinking he was seeing a ghost, nearly dropped the phone as their oldest son, Bob, approached with cell phone in hand. He had arrived unannounced from Pennsylvania. Now the circle was complete.

Ralph has traveled on mission trips, providing dental care in South Africa, Peru and Haiti. Following the completion of dental treatment in Haiti, the group gathered for a time of sharing. Apparently, the leg of his lawn chair was misaligned. Ralph fell backwards, arms and legs in the air and on his back in the bushes. His white shirt was covered with green stains.

Normally, this would not be a problem, except that he had given all his shirts away to the locals. But Ralph is a resourceful man. Knowing that every airport has a gift shop, he would just buy one in Port-au-Prince. The shop was low on inventory, one shirt. When he arrived in Miami, he tried it on. The size 50 shirt looked like a mu-mu. The stained shirt would have to do. At least he had 4½ hours to think of an explanation to Phyllis.

Ralph is an avid snow skier. He spent many years on refinished WW II skis without release bindings. He recently decided to save his new knees and purchased shaped skis with the latest release bindings. I just learned yesterday that he negotiated the Black

Diamond Exhibition Run at Sun Valley, Idaho. But, it was on his back. He also enjoyed water skiing on Tulalip Bay near Everett, Washington and Lake Chelan in North Central Washington. I would like to tell you about Ralph's ability as a golfer. But, according to my sources, he does not have any. Even if he is not a great golfer, we all know what a fine dentist and outstanding gentleman Ralph is.

Please join me in honoring Dr Ralph Stenberg as the 2007 Distinguished Member of the American Academy of Gold Foil Operators.

Rick Nash