

Clifford M Sturdevant

1918-2008

Dr Clifford Max Sturdevant, an international leader in academic dentistry, one of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry's first faculty members and one of the founders of the Academy of Operative Dentistry, passed away on September 9, 2008 at the age of 90.

Dr Sturdevant was born and raised in Nebraska. His family moved to Atlanta in 1938, and he received his DDS degree in 1943 from Atlanta-Southern (Emory) Dental School. After graduation, he served for two years as a Captain in the United States Army Dental Corps.

Upon separation from the Army, he started his dental teaching career at Atlanta-Southern Dental School with his father, Roger. Together, they moved to Chapel Hill in 1950 and were two of the original four founding faculty members at the dental school. After his father retired as the founding Chairman of the Department of Operative Dentistry, Cliff became the Department's second Chairman—serving in that role from 1959 to 1979. His son, Dr John Roger Sturdevant, has also taught at the dental school for 29 years, making a three-generation tradition at the UNC School of Dentistry.

Dr Ted Roberson, who served almost four decades on the Operative Dentistry faculty and is now the school's Director of Professional Relations, remembers Dr Sturdevant coming to him when he was a fourth-year DDS student, asking Dr Roberson to join the faculty. "It was a real honor that he asked me to join the faculty and gave me such opportunities throughout my career, and that I was able to follow him as the department's chair," he said. "He demanded excellence, and that's what he always displayed himself. He loved this dental school and this university, and he loved operative dentistry."

"Dr Cliff," as he was known to the school community, amassed major achievements in dental research, scholarship and education. He was one of the school's first researchers, receiving a US Bureau of Standards grant to study dental materials and was instrumental in



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establishing one of the nation's first clinical research programs in Operative Dentistry and Biomaterials at the School of Dentistry in 1970. Through his foresight and vision, this internationally recognized clinical research program has had a dramatic impact on the teaching and practice of restorative dentistry. "Many of the restorative materials and techniques in use today in operative dentistry have, in some way, been pioneered or evaluated by the clinical research program in operative dentistry at UNC," said Dr Al Wilder, a professor of operative dentistry and Director of Clinical Research in the department.

Dr Sturdevant was the first editor and author of *The Art and Science of Operative Dentistry*, which became the bestselling operative dentistry textbook worldwide. Dr Roberson, who is now editor for the textbook, asked

the publisher to change the title to *Sturdevant's Art and Science of Operative Dentistry* to reflect Dr Sturdevant's scholastic contribution to operative dentistry. The textbook is now in its fifth edition, 40 years after its first printing in 1968, and remains an international standard.

Dr Sturdevant received the North Carolina Dental Society's Meritorious Achievement Award in 2001. He was one of the founders of the Academy of Operative Dentistry, served as its President in 1975 and won the Award of Excellence from that Academy in 1995. He was chairperson of the AADS Operative Dentistry Section, President of the Supreme Chapter of Omicron Kappa Upsilon Dental Society and was a Fellow of the American College of Dentists. He was the first recipient of the Brauer Service Award of the UNC Dental Alumni Association. Another example of his national contribution to dental education was his leadership within Project ACORDE (A Consortium on Restorative Dentistry Education), created in the mid-1970s to standardize operative dentistry teaching materials throughout all US dental schools.

Dr Clifford Sturdevant retired from the school's faculty in 1980, earning the distinction of being the first member of the school's faculty to retire with 30 years of service. Even after his retirement, he remained deeply committed to the school's future, said Dr Ken May, the school's vice dean and a member of the Department of Operative Dentistry faculty for the past 32 years. "He was a true leader in dental education," he said. "His tenacity regarding clinical excellence and with the clinical research program was of the highest rank."

Both Drs May and Wilder remember hearing, as UNC-Chapel Hill dental students, the much-repeated story of Dr Sturdevant and Dr John Brauer, the school's first dean, sometimes passing each other in the parking lot near the dental school in the middle of the night during the school's formative years—Dr Sturdevant leaving work and Dr Brauer coming to work. "Few can equal Dr Sturdevant's commitment to excellence in clinical dentistry, and the clinical faculty still measures itself by his expectations," Dr Wilder said. Dr Cliff's motto, which sat on his desk, was "If it's almost right, it's wrong."

Dr Sturdevant will be remembered by many for his warm, outgoing personality. He loved to communicate with others by voice, written word and by song. He was blessed with a wonderful tenor voice and sang in church choirs for many years. His life was centered around his church, his family and service to others. For years, Dr Sturdevant was an active member of the University Baptist Church, Carrboro Baptist Church, and most recently, the Mt Carmel Baptist Church.

Dr Clifford M Sturdevant is survived by his three children: Barbara Jeanne Andrews of Bangor, ME; Paula May Mercer of Richmond, VA and John Roger Sturdevant of Chapel Hill, NC; by his four grandchildren, Laura Stowe of Bangor, ME; Adam Mercer of Ashburnham, MA; Kelly Mercer of Richmond, VA and Adam Sturdevant of Chapel Hill, NC; and by his three great-grandchildren, Olivia Stowe and Spencer Stowe of Bangor, ME and Charlotte Mercer of Ashburnham, MA. His wife of more than 67 years, Betty, passed away on March 11, 2008.

Michael A Cochran, Editor

COMMENT

I would like to thank Dr Edward Swift and the Office of the Dean of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry for supplying the information contained in this In Memoriam. Interested friends, colleagues and students may make donations to the Dr Clifford M Sturdevant Endowment Fund for Clinical Research in Operative Dentistry. Checks, made out to "UNC Dental Foundation—Sturdevant Fund" may be mailed to the Dental Foundation of North Carolina, UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry, Campus Box 7451, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7451, USA.

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