

Academy of Operative Dentistry

## Award of Excellence

Dr. Bruce W. Small



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It is my distinct pleasure and honor to be able to introduce this year's awardee of the Operative Academy's Award of Excellence to Dr. Bruce W. Small. I was supposed to give this presentation last year but a small pesky virus intervened so I am now finally able to award this belated honor to you at this 2022 AOD meeting. It is better late Bruce, than not at all.

Bruce graduated from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in 1973. Following graduation from dental school, he took a yearlong postgraduate residency after which he started his private practice in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, almost 50 years ago. He didn't know then that his dental career path would be changed forever by an event unforeseen by him at the time.

I first became acquainted with Bruce by a very circuitous route that started with a conversation with Fred Eichmiller, at an AAGFO meeting in Orlando, Florida, in the fall of 1993, in which he mention a person interested in gold by the name of Bruce Small. I thanked Fred for mentioning my name to Bruce as a potential speaker and promptly put the conversation in the "will never happen" bin. Much to my surprise and amazement, I received a call from Bruce asking if I would give a presentation on "gold" to the upcoming New Jersey Chapter of Cosmetic Dentistry meeting. I paused, gasped, and then the thought crossed my mind about how the Christians must have felt being tossed to the lions in the arenas across the Roman Empire. I was somewhat aghast but recovered my composure enough to say yes I would, and the title would be on "How to Make Gold Restorations Esthetic." I thought this title might placate the naysayers and perhaps peak the interest of others in the group.

I presented the lecture in the spring of 1994 in New Jersey, and it ended with a nice courteous applause from the meeting attendees. I figured that was that, until Bruce mentioned after the lecture that he would like to start a hands-on study club in his office. Now I was in a real pickle; do I take on this task or do I suggest someone else? I reluctantly told Bruce that I would help him start a study club, so a date was set for the first study club meeting later that year. When I arrived for the meeting in a suit and tie, the prospective member's attire was anywhere from beach dress to casual. I knew I had my work cut out for me to change the culture of this group. It was a motley crew, to say the least, but I now knew that I had long-term job security, if I so desired.

Over the next 5 years or so, the members started dressing like professionals, and their work improved accordingly. I thought this was an apropos time to suggest to Bruce that perhaps the club should look for another mentor, as it was a long distance to travel and the club was meeting eight times a year. Without hesitation, he answered, "I don't think so," and that was the beginning of a long friendship, both professionally and personally. I can regale you with many other stories about Bruce and I and the nights we held sway in his home on various topics, but I won't. Suffice it to say, out of these numerous evening soirees, with some wine or aperitifs and often a cigar, we developed a deep friendship, and I saw the beginning of a dental epiphany in Bruce. This was the beginning of his journey with alchemy and the transformation of composites and amalgams into beautiful long-lasting functional gold restorations for his patients.

In my experience, there are mainly three types of people one deals with throughout their lifetime. The first type makes things happen, the second type watches things happen, and the third type wonders what happened. After getting to know Bruce, maybe too well, I soon realized that he was the first type, which made things happen. He also showed a thirst and a quest to learn and improve his knowledge

and skills. He has taken more than 3000 hours of continuing education, not only to improve his skills and knowledge but also to improve his abilities to provide excellent care and treatment to his patients. He further has given over 400 continuing education courses and lectures to share this knowledge and skills with his fellow dentists. He has published more than 130 articles in various dental publications, many being on dental techniques, and has served as a reviewer on editorial boards. He presently teaches several hands-on dental study clubs, given many table clinics, given freely of his time to his alma mater, and has been lecturing for more than 25 years, nationally and internationally. He has served in the offices of many dental organizations and academies including our own Academy of Operative Dentistry.

As noted, Bruce has been a very active contributor to the profession of dentistry—perhaps one might say an overachiever. It has been an honor and privilege for me to have mentored and watched Bruce accept the challenges of his profession, master them, and pass them on to our younger colleagues. He has chosen the path in dentistry of the “harder right than the easier wrong.” It is especially an honor for me to be asked by Bruce to make this presentation. Without further ado, it is my esteem pleasure to present today the Award of Excellence to a truly deserving person, Dr. Bruce W. Small, from the members of the Academy of Operative Dentistry for his outstanding contributions to excellence in dentistry and to this academy.

Warren K Johnson