Marletta McKercher retired this fall after 40 years with the School of Dentistry. McKercher joined the School in 1972 and worked as a secretary and administrative assistant under three deans, beginning with the late Dean Dr. Robert Vining and followed by the late Dr. Raymond Shaddy (acting dean) and Dr. Gerald Brundo.

“It is always fortunate to have individuals in an organization who are so very dedicated and, additionally, who really know what’s going on,” said Brundo, DDS’69, dean emeritus and professor of prosthodontics. “Marletta is one of those individuals.

“When I was chosen to be the dean (in 1984), Marletta was the dean’s administrative assistant. While I had graduated from Creighton’s dental school, I had been away for 15 years.

“Having Marletta to help me become familiar with Creighton’s administrative system was amazingly beneficial. Because she has served excellently and successfully in so many roles, our dental school’s achievements are in no small way attributed to her loyalty and her competence. Most certainly, we will miss her.”

In 1987, McKercher was promoted to coordinator of the School’s continuing education (CE) program, and continued in that position until her retirement this fall.

Dr. Mark Latta, current dean of the School, recognized McKercher’s contributions during a special ceremony at the School in October.

“Marletta’s 40 years of service to the School of Dentistry are a testament to her dedication and commitment to the School,” Dr. Latta said. “We thank her for her years of service and her many contributions to our School and wish her all the best in her retirement.”


Dr. Ken Hermsen, professor of endodontics, worked closely with McKercher in the CE program and was amazed at her “unique” filing system, which had “everything piled on top of her desk.”

While it may have looked unorganized to the casual observer, Dr. Hermsen added, “In all the time we worked together, I don’t recall a time when she ever lost track of anything.”

If he asked for a document or report, McKercher would “dig down a few layers and come up with just the needed item.”

“I think this is a metaphor for Marletta. She made order out of chaos. Marletta’s work ethic and attention to detail created order out of an otherwise chaotic process. Her efforts have allowed the School of Dentistry to become one of the leaders in dental continuing education in the Midwest, helping the School fulfill its mission of lifelong learning for its graduates and the dental community.”

Patti Churchill, administrative assistant in Dental Admissions and Student Affairs, has worked at the School for 42 years and is a close friend.

She said McKercher annually coordinated the School’s Dental Assembly. “She is a very detailed person.” And, with her work in CE, she was very accessible to alumni. “She knows the alumni so well.”

McKercher, for her part, said she has very much enjoyed working at the School.

“The best thing about working at the School of Dentistry was the great people, students, faculty, staff and visitors — wonderful, interesting, and, at times, challenging, but they kept life very exciting,” McKercher said.

In retirement, McKercher is looking forward to volunteering at her church and renewing old friendships.

“I’m not going to give up working with people,” she said.
Happy New Year to all, and on behalf of the faculty, staff and students in the School of Dentistry, we wish you many blessings in 2013.

I am so very grateful for the support we receive from you, our graduates, and for the remarkable way you carry the Creighton mission in your practices, communities and families.

This academic year marks two very high priority activities within the School.

First, a very successful Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) site visit was completed in September. Predoctoral dental education programs are reviewed every seven years. Our site visit was preceded by an 18-month, in-depth self-study that culminated in a three-day visit from an external evaluation team. CODA policy limits what we are allowed to communicate about the details of the visit, but we do expect a totally clear path to full accreditation following the Council’s late January meeting. Our entire community of faculty, staff and students deserves credit and my sincere thanks for this outstanding outcome. I’d like to especially acknowledge Dr. Pat Kelsey, who led the process, for his outstanding work.

Secondly, this coming May will mark the formation of a new Diagnostic Sciences Department. Dr. John Shaner will serve as this department’s inaugural chairperson. We believe reorganizing several clinical activities from the General Dentistry Department under this new umbrella will significantly improve our clinical operations, as well as streamline patient flow, resulting in better educational opportunities for our students and better care for our patients.

Finally, I’d like to extend a special thank you to Mrs. Marletta McKercher for her more than 40 years of dedicated service to Creighton. She has exemplified in her career the mantra of being “with and for” others in her numerous roles in the School.

Again, my sincere thanks to all of you for the many ways you support the School of Dentistry and Creighton University.

Mark A. Latta, D.M.D., M.S.
Dean, School of Dentistry

Dean’s Message

Creighton’s chapter of the Student National Dental Association (SNDA) was honored as the SNDA Small Chapter of the Year (under 50 members) at the SNDA/National Dental Association Annual Conference in Boca Raton, Fla., in July. The chapter also placed third overall in the SNDA scrapbook competition.

Chapter of the Year awards are based on chapter participation in an oral cancer awareness event, impressions program, mentoring program, participation in monthly conference calls, active national membership, number of events, type of events, year-end chapter review, and overall representation of the national mission statement.

“The purpose of Creighton’s chapter of the Student National Dental Association is to provide community support to Omaha and its surrounding areas,” said Teryn Sedillo, class of 2014 and Creighton SNDA president. “Through the collaboration of students and faculty, we hope to fulfill the mission of Creighton’s School of Dentistry to ‘instill caring, ethical and moral components in [our] professional lives.’”

Gregory Davis, DDS’79, assistant professor of prosthodontics, serves as the faculty mentor for the chapter. In addition to Sedillo, chapter officers include Eric Lomas, vice president; Alvin Samuel, secretary; Brittney Penberthy, treasurer; Chris Young, sergeant at arms; Debleena Dash, public relations; Crystal Willie, scrapbook; and Caitlyn Bell and Morgan Price, community service.

Dr. Galt Named Research Dean

Kimberly Galt, Pharm.D., Ph.D., has been named assistant vice president for multidisciplinary health sciences research and associate dean for research for the schools of Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy and Health Professions. Galt is a respected leader with a proven record of accomplishment in federally competitive interdisciplinary research, research program development and research administration. Her broad experience in both the arts and sciences and health sciences makes her well-suited for working with faculty and students within and across disciplines, as well as in collaborative and interdisciplinary relationships. She is an experienced program evaluator and consultant for state health and human services offices (public health and disease prevention, rural health), private organizations and professional associations in areas related to research, service and professional practice. Her past professional practice experience includes providing clinical services through interdisciplinary ambulatory health care practice in the Veterans Administration and hospital administration at Hermann Hospital in the Texas Medical Center, a private academic health science center.

Gregory Davis, DDS’79, faculty mentor for Creighton’s SNDA chapter, is flanked by SNDA officers, from left, Teryn Sedillo (president), Chelsea Wiggins (immediate past vice president), Caitlyn Bell and Morgan Price.
The 7-year-old girl sat bravely in the dental chair, as her sister sat next to her comfortingly holding her hand. With more dental education, the little girl most likely would not have been sitting there — waiting to have rotted teeth pulled.

“It’s overwhelming,” said Bob Hogan, DDS’87, an Omaha dentist who, in October, helped open a small dental clinic on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. “By the third hour, I was pretty much in tears.

“There is unbelievable need,” he continued. “It was a very humbling experience.”

Dr. Hogan got involved with the project about three years ago. “I’ve always wanted to do more volunteer work,” he said. It was a Creighton connection that got him thinking more seriously about service-related work. His daughter, Laurin, BSBA’10, was a student at Creighton at the time, and her roommate’s father, an ophthalmologist from Denver, was performing volunteer cataract surgeries in Ixtapa, Mexico.

“I thought, ‘I would love to do something like that,’” Dr. Hogan said. Calls to Jesuits at Creighton University and Creighton Prep High School led him to Fr. John Hatcher, S.J., president of the St. Francis Mission on the Rosebud Reservation.

The Reservation’s roughly 25,000 residents were in need of a dental clinic. The only other clinic is located in a small hospital about 20 miles from the St. Francis Mission in Mission, S.D. It handles primarily dental emergencies, and sometimes patients can wait up to three hours for care.

A dentist from Illinois had donated dental equipment, but staffing a clinic was another matter. Laurin Hogan, a graduate of Creighton’s entrepreneurial business program, gave her dad some ideas for the clinic.

And Dr. Hogan tapped Creighton’s dental students for support, working with faculty member Kelly Gould, R.D.H.

Over fall break in October, Dr. Hogan, a couple of other dental professionals and four Creighton dental students spent a week seeing patients at the Rosebud Dental Clinic, which featured four chairs, one specifically for X-rays. The team saw about 20 patients a day over the five days — many of them with problems that could have been avoided with more education.

“They’re giving babies bottles of Kool-Aid at bed,” Dr. Hogan said. “You would see a 7-year-old with all of his teeth bombed out. Things that could really be prevented.”

Dr. Hogan said he enjoyed working with the Creighton students. “It was a blast,” he said. “The Creighton students are really conscientious, really hard workers.”

The clinic is still in its infancy, Dr. Hogan stressed, and he encourages alumni to contact him with ideas to make the clinic even more successful. He can be reached at hoganlake@aol.com.

A crucifix constructed entirely of dental instruments now hangs in the lobby of the dental school’s main clinic.

The school commissioned South Dakota artist Jacque Frazee to create the sculpture in honor of the inauguration of Timothy R. Lannon, S.J., as Creighton’s 24th president. Fr. Lannon celebrated the one-year anniversary of his inauguration in September.

A dedication and blessing of the sculpture was held Aug. 13 at the school, with Fr. Lannon in attendance.

“When the announcement was made that Timothy R. Lannon of the Society of Jesus would become the 24th president of the University, it’s not an exaggeration to say there was great excitement across the campus, great optimism, and none more so than in the School of Dentistry,” said Dean Mark Latta. “We were thinking about a way to commemorate his inauguration.”

Before unveiling the sculpture, he added, “I think when you see it, you will realize it makes a very powerful statement.”

Thomas Shanahan, S.J., chaplain for the School of Dentistry, blessed the sculpture, and Fr. Lannon expressed his appreciation for the artwork.

“I really appreciate this wonderful gesture. It really is magnificent,” Fr. Lannon said. “I can’t tell you how much it means to me.”
Anlee Kappenman Rola, DDS’77, of Sioux Falls, S.D., was presented with the School’s 2012 Alumni Merit Award during Alumni Weekend in September. Dr. Rola is part of a Creighton dental legacy begun by her father, the late Dr. James Kappenman, a 1946 graduate. Three of Dr. Rola’s siblings graduated from Creighton dental school, Jay, Tim and Tami, as did her daughter Jackie. Dr. Rola and brother Tim have a private practice in Sioux Falls. Dr. Rola’s three daughters attended Creighton.

She has served as a board member for the American Dental Association, for the South Dakota Dental Board of Directors, for the Southeastern District Dental Society and for the Pierre Fauchard Academy. Dr. Rola is committed to providing quality dental care to her patients and leading efforts to give better access to care for low-income families.

For her public service and expertise, the South Dakota Chapter of the International College of Dentists awarded her both the Outstanding Dentist of the Year Award and the Fellowship Award.

She is an emerita member and former president of the School’s Alumni Advisory Board, working to ensure that Creighton dental students continue to receive the best clinical education possible.

The Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), a professional association of more than 37,000 general dentists dedicated to providing quality dental care and oral health education to the public, awarded Creighton alumnus John Dougherty, DDS’91, its 2012 Mastership Award during its annual meeting in June in Philadelphia.

The Mastership Award is the highest honor available at the AGD and one of the most respected designations within the profession. To accomplish this goal, Dr. Dougherty completed 1,100 hours of continuing dental education.

Dr. Dougherty moved to Phoenix after graduating from Creighton and has owned Artistic Dental at the Biltmore since 2000.

There are 169,000 dentists in the United States and Canada and fewer than 2 percent of those are Masters with the AGD.

Creighton’s chapter of the American Student Dental Association (ASDA) raised $2,500 during its annual Smile Miles 5K run on Aug. 25. Funds raised from entries and donations are used to provide dentures to patients at the School of Dentistry who cannot afford them. About 55 students, faculty, local dentists and local running enthusiasts participated in this year’s event. The $2,500 raised is enough to supplement funding for 12 arches of dentures for patients who cannot afford them.

Creighton dental student Rory Manke (D4) is the recipient of an annual scholarship award from the Pierre Fauchard Academy Foundation for outstanding academic achievements in dentistry. He is pictured with Gary Westerman, DDS’69, professor and chair of community and preventive dentistry and the Dr. Philip Maschka Chair for Ethics in Dentistry.

Creighton University President Timothy R. Lannon, S.J., with Alumni Merit Award recipient Anlee Kappenman Rola, DDS’77, and Dean Mark Latta.

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Creighton dental student Erin Crawford (D4) was the recipient of the Dr. David A. Reinsch Humanitarian Award. Pictured at top, Dean Mark Latta presented her with the award on Aug. 15. The award recognizes a dental student who embodies the spirit of humanitarianism and believes in the equality and the welfare of others as demonstrated through community service, advocacy and leadership.

Creighton University President Timothy R. Lannon, S.J., with Alumni Merit Award recipient Anlee Kappenman Rola, DDS’77, and Dean Mark Latta.
Providing Care at Precious Memories

Gary Westerman, DDS’69, professor and chair of Community and Preventive Dentistry and holder of the Oscar S. Belzer Endowed Chair in Dentistry, provided free dental checks to children at Precious Memories Child Care in Omaha. The majority of children at the nonprofit daycare come from families on welfare. The event was a community health project organized by Creighton nursing students.

Focus on Dr. Ronk: Bluejay Fan, PT Instructor

There is no doubt that Dr. Richard Ronk Jr., a part-time instructor in the sophomore removable prosthetics laboratory since 1978, is a diehard Creighton Bluejay athletics fan, especially when it comes to men’s basketball.

Last year, he missed his first Creighton men’s basketball home game since his freshman year as an undergraduate student at Creighton in 1971 as he underwent surgery. It was a late game, and, luckily for Dr. Ronk, it was on TV. But even recuperating in a hospital bed, it was hard for Dr. Ronk to temper his enthusiasm. “The nurse had to come in and ask me to quiet down,” he says with a smile.

Dr. Ronk comes from a Creighton family. His wife, Laural Hopp, BS’76, is a Creighton graduate, as was his father, Richard Sr., BSC’50; his brother-in-law, Dr. Russell Hopp, a Creighton physician; and his children, Eric, BS’04, and Alison, BA’05. So was his dentist growing up in Council Bluffs, Iowa, the late Richard Weaver, BSD’33, DDS’35. Dr. Weaver practiced with Dr. Robert Vining, who eventually served as dean of the Creighton dental school.

Dr. Ronk came to Creighton in 1971, seeking a biology degree. He was accepted into Creighton’s dental school before completing his undergraduate degree, and earned his D.D.S. in 1978.

Upon graduation, he took over Dr. Weaver’s practice. At about that same time, he was offered an opportunity to work part-time at Creighton in removable prostodontics, which he eagerly agreed to. “The biggest incentive was I got free basketball tickets.” (He would later practice with Creighton graduates Dennis, DDS’67, and Brad Higginbotham, DDS’83. Dennis is a member of the faculty, as well.)

Now, Dr. Ronk can’t imagine his professional life without teaching. “I truly enjoy it,” he said. “Teaching is a way of giving back, I find it fulfilling and hopefully I can help the next generation of students.”

School Announces New Faculty Appointments

Timothy Walker, D.D.S., M.S.
Alumnus Timothy Walker, DDS’85, M.S., joined the Creighton dental faculty in July 2012 as assistant professor of oral maxillofacial radiology in the Department of General Dentistry.

After graduating from Creighton, Dr. Walker worked as an associate in private practice and also for the Omaha Indian Reservation Dental Clinic.

In 1990, he joined the U.S. Navy. In June 1991, Dr. Walker was assigned as the dental officer for the USS Long Beach (CGN9), which was deployed to the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Desert Storm.

After his release from active duty in 1993, he returned to Omaha to open Timothy F. Walker, D.D.S., P.C., in southwest Omaha.

In June 2008, Dr. Walker sold his dental practice and worked at the dental school in radiology for one year. He earned an M.S. degree and certificate in oral maxillofacial radiology from the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio in May.

Toshiki Takamizawa, D.D.S., Ph.D.
Dr. Toshiki Takamizawa, an assistant professor in the Department of Operative Dentistry at Nihon University School of Dentistry in Japan, has joined the Creighton University School of Dentistry as a visiting professor.

Dr. Takamizawa earned both his D.D.S. (1995) and his Ph.D. (2002) from Nihon. He is a member of the International Association for Dental Research, the Japanese Society of Conservative Dentistry, the Japanese Society for Dental Materials and Devices, the Japanese Society for Adhesive Dentistry, and the Japan Academy of Esthetic Dentistry.

In 2007, Dr. Takamizawa was presented with a research award from the Japanese Society for Adhesive Dentistry.

Timothy McVaney, D.D.S., M.S.
Dr. Timothy McVaney recently became a full-time faculty member. Having previously served as a contributed service faculty member, he is very familiar with Creighton.

He joined the Department of Periodontics at Creighton as a part-time clinical faculty member in 1987 at the rank of adjunct professor.

In 1997, he became a full-time member of the Department of Periodontics as an associate professor.

He served as director of Continuing Education from 1992 to 1998. In 2001, he was appointed as an associate professor to the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, serving as course director for pain control and the director of the surgical section of implant dentistry.

McVaney is a 1974 graduate of the College of Dentistry at the University of Nebraska, where he also received his M.S. in periodontics.
Students Awarded for Table Clinics

Congratulations to the students who participated in freshman/sophomore table clinics in July. The top three teams are listed below:

First place: “Effect of Water Additives to pH”; team leader, Melissa Trumpp; team members, Geoffrey Grant, Cody Gunnell, Kenneth Tjeerdsm, Mary Tomlinson, Brett Urban, Sara VanDemark, Jesse Varoz; faculty mentor, Dr. Martha Nunn.

Second place: “Effects of Various Hand-washing Techniques on Dental Infection Control in the Dental Clinic”; team leader, Neil Breshnahan; team members, Oluyemi Alabi, Jenna Bethke, John Bisson, Ashley Borcher, Brett Bowen, Caleb Brewer, John Campbell, Alec Griffin, Robert Grode; faculty mentor, Dr. Hardeep Chehal.


Dr. Norton Honored as Distinguished Alumnus

Dr. Neil Norton, professor of oral biology, director of Admissions and associate dean for Student Affairs, was presented with Randolph-Macon College’s Distinguished Alumnus Award on Oct. 19. Dr. Norton earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in biology in 1988 from Randolph-Macon College, located in Ashland, Va.

Dr. Norton is the recipient of numerous awards, including the ADEA/ GlaxoSmithKline Sensodyne Excellence in Teaching Award, Creighton’s Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Award for Teaching Achievement, the Outstanding Instructor of the Year Award and the Dr. Theodore J. Urban Pre-Clinical Award. He has presented work at national and international meetings, authored 80 abstracts and several book chapters, and has published numerous peer-reviewed articles.

Dr. Norton joined the Creighton faculty in 1996. He was named to his current position as associate dean and admissions director in 2010.

Graduates and their families gathered for Alumni Weekend, Sept. 20-23. Reunion parties were held for the classes of 1962, 1972, 1982, 1987, 1992 and 2002. Anlee Kappenman Rola, DDS’77, of Sioux Falls, S.D., was presented with the School’s 2012 Alumni Merit Award (see story inside).