From the Heart:
After-hours clinic serves patients in need

Encouraging American Indian Dentists
Serving Rural Nebraska
Higginbotham Receives Alumni Merit Award
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Message from the Dean

As I reflected on these past months and reviewed the stories for this issue of the Creighton Dentist magazine, I was overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude.

I feel deep gratitude to serve with people like Dr. Dennis Higginbotham, the 2015 Alumni Merit Award Winner. Students, faculty and alumni know Dr. Higginbotham for his devotion to the dental profession, commitment to learning and compassion to others. Please extend your congratulations to Dr. Higginbotham.

Students like Michelle Falbo, this year’s Reinsch Humanitarian Award recipient, illustrate a celebration of our Jesuit values and application of professionalism. I am thankful that in my time as both a faculty member and in my deanship that I continue to see high-quality students dedicated to not only their education but also to others.

Dr. Dean Cope and Dr. Frank Patterson, featured in this magazine, help illustrate the important need for expansion of rural dentistry. Additionally, I am thankful for support of the Dental Clinic and Educational Facility Grant Fund proposal (LB584). This bill would provide a small one-time contract to aid in the establishment of a dental clinic and oral health training facility to serve the public health needs of the residents of the state of Nebraska. Their efforts illustrate the commitment our alumni have not only to their communities but to our school.

The passage of LB584 helps pave the way to address the space constraints and renovations necessary for our school to continue to grow. Additionally, the expanded rural clinical experiences in which our students will participate will be a hallmark of a Creighton dental education. We continue to work with community leaders to identify opportunities for support for a new facility. We hope to share more information before the end of the academic year.

Thank you to all the alumni who participated in Homecoming and Fall Dental Assembly. It was a wonderful opportunity for our alumni to reconnect with each other, the school and our University. I enjoyed meeting with many of you during the weekend.

Finally, I would like to share in the enthusiasm of welcoming the Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, S.J., as the 25th president of Creighton University. (You can follow him on social media via Twitter, @CreightonPres, and Facebook, CreightonPresident.) I look forward to working with him on our school’s initiatives and seeing a renewed commitment to growth for the overall University.

Mark A. Latta, DMD, M.S.
Dean
Benn’s Discovery Could Spare Patients the Drill

Douglas Benn, Ph.D., DDS’10, explains how his research may decrease the need for tooth fillings in some cases.

The days of the dental drill-and-fill as the standard solution for tooth decay may be numbered if a discovery by Douglas Benn, Ph.D., DDS’10, continues to advance.

Benn, professor of diagnostic sciences, has created a simple diagnostic liquid solution that can be applied to the surfaces of a patient’s teeth prior to a dental X-ray. The diagnostic liquid will help dentists to more readily see cavitated decay on a standard X-ray and will also allow the dentist to use recently developed topical products to arrest tooth decay at an early stage, thereby preserving healthy tooth structure and utilizing a simple, pain-free method of detection and treatment, without anesthesia or drilling.

Dental caries is the most common infection in the world and probably the one producing the most anxiety in potential dental patients. Caries goes through two stages: an initial noncavitated state where decay can stop and no filling is needed, and a later cavitated state where a filling is often needed to stop decay from progressing. Currently, dentists do not have a test to determine the difference between the two states, and this leads to the standard treatment: a drilling and a filling. But decay doesn’t automatically mean a cavity, and the filling cure can often be more trouble than it’s worth.

“Most dentists see decay and they go to the drill and the filling,” said Benn. “Once a tooth is filled, it leads to a repair-destruction cycle for the rest of the patient’s life.”

And while the diagnostic liquid can help ward off the drill, it can also help dentists pick up more infection that could otherwise go unnoticed and also aid in the classification of tooth decay.

Benn has received $850,000 from the National Institutes of Health for this research. He’s also being aided by a $500,000 grant from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

Upcoming Continuing Education Events

> CBCT for the General Dentist
Feb. 12, 2016
Creighton University
Harper Center
3 CE Hours
Presenter: Timothy Walker, DDS’85, assistant professor and director of oral and maxillofacial radiology, Creighton University

> 15th Annual Pain Management Conference
March 11, 2016
Marriott Regency
Omaha
CE TBD

> 2016 Creighton University Implant Symposium
June 10, 2016
Embassy Suites – La Vista, Neb.
6 CE Hours
Presenter: Brian Mealey, DDS, M.S., professor and graduate program director, Department of Periodontics, UT Health Science Center at San Antonio

School Welcomes New Faculty

The School of Dentistry welcomed three new faculty this fall — two alumni and a visiting research scholar from Japan.

**Kimberly Weickert McFarland, BA‘83, DDS‘87**

Kimberly McFarland is the new chair of community and preventive dentistry. She also teaches dental public health, ethics and professionalism.

McFarland served as the dental director for the state of Nebraska for 15 years prior to entering academia as a full-time faculty member at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) College of Dentistry from 2006 to 2015.

She is involved with numerous committees, professional societies and other teaching activities. She is the past president of the American Association of Public Health Dentistry (AAPHD) and is the first woman to chair the American Dental Association’s (ADA) Council on Access, Prevention and Interpersonal Relations (CAPIR).

McFarland has worked in private practice and provided services at the Carl T. Curtis Health Education Center for the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska. From 2004 to 2013, she worked with Nebraska Public Health Dental Clinics providing oral surgery services exclusively for underserved populations. In addition to teaching, research and grant writing, McFarland serves as a mentor for minority and disadvantaged students interested in becoming health professionals. She also serves as a consultant one day a week to the UNMC Pediatric Dental Residency Program at Children’s Hospital and Medical Center.

McFarland has worked extensively with communities, state legislators and decision-makers to fluoridate public water systems, establish public health clinics and address oral health workforce needs.

She is the recipient of many awards, including the 2005 Nebraska Dental Association Service Award and the 2003 American Association of Public Health Dentistry Outstanding Service Award.

**Cynthia Russell, BS‘80, DDS‘84**

A 1984 graduate of Creighton University School of Dentistry, Cynthia Russell has returned as a full-time associate professor in the departments of diagnostic sciences and general dentistry. Upon graduation, Russell opened her private practice that she maintained until 2015. She also served as an assistant clinical instructor for operative dentistry from 1985 to 2015.

Russell is a dedicated member of her community, serving on several committees and holding executive positions for the Nebraska Society for Dentistry for Children and the Nebraska Muscular Dystrophy Association. She is the founder and CEO for the Omaha St. Jude’s Golf Classic and is a lifetime member of the Creighton University Alumni Advisory Board. Russell has also served as president of the Omaha Jaycees, and in 1991 she received the outstanding part-time dental faculty award from the senior class.

**Akimaka Tsujimoto, DDS, Ph.D.**

Akimaka Tsujimoto is an assistant professor in the department of operative dentistry at Nihon University in Tokyo. As a visiting research scholar in the School of Dentistry, he is working on in-vitro research in the dental materials laboratory, especially wear-resistance of resin-based composite materials and fatigue-resistance of bonding interface of dental adhesive systems.

He is a member of numerous societies, including the International Association for Dental Research, the Japanese Society for Conservative Dentistry and the Japanese Society for Dental Materials.

Tsujimoto has co-authored many articles and was honored with the Academy of Nihon University Research Award in 2013 and 2014. He is also the recipient of the Masuhara Memorial Award and the Young Researcher’s Award from the Japan Society for Adhesive Dentistry.

For more information, updates or to register, visit creighton.edu/CDE
It Shapes Your Heart, Mind and Soul

ILAC program remains an important volunteer opportunity for alumni, students and faculty

Twelve students, seven faculty and four alumni from the School of Dentistry traveled to the Dominican Republic this summer as part of the Institute for Latin American Concern (ILAC) program to serve the poor and marginalized living in the rural towns around Santiago.

The School of Dentistry has played an important part in the ILAC program since its beginning in 1973. The late Raymond Shaddy, DDS ’53, former dean of the School of Dentistry, saw to it that the dental school was involved with ILAC and since then, students and faculty teams have seen approximately 1,200 patients annually. Ideally, each dental team includes two students and a volunteer dentist or faculty member to operate in six rural towns (camps), each home to seven or more families.

Under the direction of professor Terry Wilwerding, DDS ’77, MS ’00, MS ’08, and associate professor James O’Meara, BA ’82, DDS ’86, this year’s teams extracted more than 900 teeth, filled more than 800 cavities and provided 30 removable partials. Associate professor Stuart McNally, BS ’01, DDS ’05, has served with ILAC every year since 2011 as a faculty member.

“If I’m going to expect the Jesuit ideal of service to others from my students, I should demonstrate my desire to do the same,” he says. “I have grown to love every aspect of the program.”

School of Dentistry senior John Kum, BSChm ’12, says that it was his love for travel that first drew him to the program as an undergraduate student during the summer of 2010.

“I served as an ‘ayundante;’ an assistant who spoke Spanish,” says Kum. “During that experience, I saw the amount of care given to the patients, and the skill and focus that the dental students,” says Wilwerding.

“Alumni ILAC participants allow us to provide this valuable service to the people of the DR, as well as enhance the immersion and professional experience for the students.”

Terry Wilwerding, DDS ’77, MS ’00, MS ’08

“There are patients who need to be added due to pain or because they have traveled a long distance, so we work them in,” she says.

McCarville says that her most rewarding experiences are seeing patients who are no longer in pain and to see patients smile with a new prosthesis.

“We share our skills and we respect each person by providing them with a quality restoration or cleaning that they deserve. By the end of the experience, many of us make pacts to return to the D.R.,” says Kum.

McNally says that one of his favorite parts of the ILAC program is seeing so many volunteers return year after year.

“Every year we get a chance to reflect on our previous experiences, and discuss how they have developed into our individual professions. I appreciate knowing participants have increased their deep love for the locals and the mission of Creighton,” says McNally. “I repeat every year that I take more from the local community than I could ever give back.”

The next Creighton dental visit to the Dominican Republic is scheduled for June 21 through July 24, 2016. Alumni volunteers are welcome to inquire about participating in the summer 2016 program. Ideally, one professional is preferred for each campo, for one- or two-week sessions. Wilwerding says that it would be nearly impossible to run the program without loyal alumni.

“Alumni ILAC participants allow us to provide this valuable service to the people of the D.R., as well as enhance the immersion and professional experience for the students,” says Wilwerding.
Michelle Falbo, MS’12, president of the class of 2016, is a self-professed natural-born leader who is not afraid to admit when she makes mistakes.

“I have always felt I was a natural-born leader, not in the authoritative sense, but as a person who can represent others fairly and respectfully,” says Falbo, who was this year’s recipient of the David A. Reinsch, DDS’81, Humanitarian Award.

“I enjoy being the voice of our class, but it hasn’t been easy. I have made my share of mistakes. I’ve had to learn to separate my emotions from certain decisions in order to make me a leader that represents everyone fairly. It’s a skill I’m continuing to shape and apply to my life outside of dental school as well.”

The award honors the memory of Reinsch, a Creighton alumnus who died of cancer in the age of 56. The award, established by his colleagues and friends, also recognizes a student who embodies a “spirit of humanitarianism, believing in the equality and the welfare of others.”

Falbo grew up in Eagan, Minn., attending a nontraditional science-based high school, the School of Environmental Studies. From there, she went to the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn.

She chose to attend Creighton for dental school because of its general dentistry focus.

“I liked that Creighton dental did not offer any specialty programs. Students get to learn from difficult cases that they would not have access to at other schools, since those cases are traditionally given to the specialty residents,” she says.

She counts herself fortunate to have had experience with difficult extractions, root canals and implant cases that normally would not be handed to a third- or fourth-year dental student.

“Since I intend to practice as a general dentist, I felt the Creighton School of Dentistry would give me the best learning opportunity for general practice.”

After she graduates and becomes a general practitioner, Falbo says she is drawn to opportunities that provide a service for those with limited access to health care. “Dentistry, for me, is all about public service. I am excited to treat, but also to educate others on the importance of oral health. For me, this is my greatest purpose.”

Class leadership has dominated much of her dental school career, with attending student/faculty advisory meetings, faculty executive meetings and organizing class events. She also found time to serve as a tutor and teaching assistant for freshman courses. She has also participated in volunteer opportunities, including the impressions program, Give Kids a Smile and the OneWorld Clinic evening screenings.

She says her time at Creighton has been a bit of a whirlwind, at times feeling like a “pushy mother that keeps nagging at you until you get it right. Other days, you walk out feeling like you could conquer the world. “The emotions that we experience in our dental education are difficult to describe. It’s a constant battle of, ‘Am I doing this right?’ and ‘Am I really good enough?’ But when it’s all said and done, you realize that all of these experiences are what shape our education. If it were easy, everyone would do it.”

She says her education has given her so much respect for the profession of dentistry and its complexity, and that she has learned how to interact with other professionals, peers and patients. “Most importantly, it’s about the people we serve and the impact our profession has in their lives. I am so grateful for the patients I have the privilege of treating.”

Falbo says she was surprised and humbled to receive the Reinsch Award, and she is appreciative of the support it provides and the donors who made it possible.

For more information, please contact the Office of Development at 402.280.2740 or giving@creighton.edu; to make a gift online, please visit creighton.edu/giving.
Students, faculty volunteer their time to care for patients in need at after-hours clinic

Every other Thursday during the academic year, at about 4:30 p.m., as the sun is getting low and the daytime dental clinic is winding down, dozens of patients start gathering in the lobby waiting area. Many are in pain or discomfort. Often they do not speak English and have had to scramble to find a way to get there. None of them can afford to see a dentist, even the dentists at the OneWorld Community Health Center in Omaha or the daytime Creighton Dental Clinic.

OneWorld, which has a longstanding relationship with the dental school, verifies that the after-hours patients do indeed have no other option. Initial screenings, including X-rays the patients bring with them, are done by Creighton students and faculty at the OneWorld community clinic on alternate weeks. Walk-ins are accepted at the after-hours clinic whenever possible.

Meanwhile, 25 or so dental students, who have already put in a full day of classes, tests, studying and other clinic work, make their way to the clinic. The student coordinators arrive first and begin organizing the files of the evening’s caseload. Then the other students arrive, chatting to each other as they put on either white or blue coats — juniors and seniors are in white and sophomores and freshmen, blue. Despite the time of day, they are eager, animated and obviously looking forward to seeing patients.

Patients such as the young lady who stayed in a menial job because she was ashamed of her front teeth, which were broken or missing. After many appointments, she became more cheerful and confident, and attained a better job.

Or the 66-year-old man who lost his farm and had to learn new skills in order to survive before eventually retiring early. He has been coming to the clinic regularly for a year and says on the night he is getting a filling, “You can’t beat the care. The students and the professors are excellent.”

Or the middle-aged woman who came in with severe pain. “Her tooth was in pretty good condition, so we didn’t want to extract it,” says sophomore dental student Maria Nord of Spokane, Wash., “but it was in desperate need of a root canal. We were able to provide that service for her and she left without pain that night.”

Or the 61-year-old grandmother who moved to Omaha from Mexico City 11 years ago and is having her teeth cleaned for the first time. After coming many times for acute needs, she is finally experiencing the luxury of a cleaning — and she is thrilled.

Many of the patients speak to their “dentists”— juniors and seniors who provide care with assistance from sophomores and freshmen, all under the supervision of faculty members — through an interpreter, who, like the students and faculty, volunteers her time.

The interpreter is Mayra Perez, a dental hygienist by day at the OneWorld Community Health Center who studied dental hygiene in a collaborative program through Creighton and Iowa Western Community College. As a student, she volunteered at Creighton’s after-hours clinic and told her instructors she wanted to come back some day to help.

“I love to be here,” Perez says. “I love to help people. It’s a great way to give back to the community. I know how important the mouth is to health.”

She recalls a pregnant woman who had painful gingivitis. “It was so severe, we could only take care of one quadrant on the first visit. I told her how harmful the gingivitis was for her baby, because everything goes into your bloodstream.”

The woman came for all of her treatments and attained healthy gums. “She still comes today, and she takes better care of herself and her whole family,” Perez says. “It’s great to see people get educated on better health.”

For the students, there are multiple reasons to volunteer at the clinic. For freshmen and sophomores, it provides exposure to patient care. First-years primarily assist, while D2s transition to recall exams and cleanings. The third year, students can begin more complex procedures, with the exception of surgery. Fourth-year students do oral surgery such as extractions and some take on the added responsibility of administering the clinic. Creighton pre-dental undergraduates also sometimes attend to observe and occasionally assist.

Mostly, the students seem to get a sense of meaning and purpose from volunteering at the clinic.

Don Schrack, BSChm’12, a senior from Kan., says, “You can really make a big difference. A half hour of your work can change their whole lives.”

Keri Kenning, a D2 from Hutchinson, Kan., says, “You can really make a big difference.”

“When you are volunteering as a student dentist, the focus is on the one particular person whose file and dental care you have been entrusted,” Schrack says. “It is often difficult, in that moment, to truly appreciate the bigger picture. Now, as a coordinator, my focus is on the needs of every person treated at each session, both individually and as a whole.”
One of the greatest benefits to me now is being able to witness the total impact made on the community in just a few hours’ time.”

Nikki Cherney, BS’13, a junior from the Chicago area who also attended the clinic as an undergrad, says it is rewarding “to be able to help people in need of dental care who truly cannot afford it. I am always overwhelmed at the number of patients who show up. It’s an eye-opener to the real need for dental care in our community.”

Nord probably speaks for all the students when she admits, however, that it is not always easy to head over to the evening clinic after a long day.

“I saw a quote the other day that said, ‘Volunteers don’t necessarily have the time, they just have the heart.’ It’s easy to talk yourself out of volunteering for the clinic. I might have a test the following day, or I’m running on five hours of sleep, or I’m only a sophomore so I cannot do procedures yet, or I’ve been at school for 12 hours,” she says.

“All of these excuses are insignificant once you see a patient’s smile or hear a simple two words: thank you. Often we get so bogged down in our own lives, our own stress, that we forget what brought us to dental school in the first place.”

Nord says the clinic allows students “to remember that helping deserving individuals is truly what brings us enjoyment. A smile on their face inevitably puts one on ours, making every minute worth it.”

The students are grateful to all the faculty who volunteer at the clinic. Currently that group includes Terry Wilwerding, DDS’77, MS’00, MS’08, professor of prosthodontics, who has been the faculty leader for more than 20 years; assistant professors Jennifer Hasler, DDS’03, Scott Radniecki, BS’08, DDS’12, and Kevin Ryan, DDS’82; and associates professors Kirstin McCarville, BS’01, DDS’05, and David Williams, DDS.

But students are quick to give the lion’s share of gratitude to Wilwerding.

“Dr. Wilwerding is the heart and soul behind the clinic,” says Rob Weiss, a senior student coordinator from St. Louis. “He’s the reason we are able to have a positive impact on the overall health of the many individuals we serve.”

Rob Weiss
Senior Student Coordinator

Lead student coordinator Don Schrack, BSChm’12, left, and fellow student coordinator Rob Weiss examine a clinic patient’s X-rays.

“Dr. Wilwerding is the heart and soul behind the clinic. He’s the reason we are able to have a positive impact on the overall health of the many individuals we serve. He really is a great mentor when it comes to community service. Not only has he played such an active and crucial role in the success of this clinic, but he also serves on many community service organizations and committees.”

Weiss’s sentiments are seconded by Schrack: “Dr. Wilwerding is and has always been the supporting backbone. He has devoted countless hours of time and energy into ensuring the success and continued forward movement of the volunteer program. When it comes to giving back to the community, Dr. Wilwerding has always been an active leader.”

Besides overseeing the night clinic year-round, Wilwerding also manages the dental component of Creighton’s Institute for Latin American Concern (ILAC) service trips to the Dominican Republic every year, traveling with selected senior students to provide dental care to those most in need.

Wilwerding, on the other hand, is just as quick to share his gratitude of the patients, and overseeing the students doing good dentistry, saying: “I am very proud of our students for participating in and enjoying this work.”

Wilwerding, who holds the Dr. Oscar S. Belzer Endowed Chair in Dentistry, says he is “a great believer in doing service, but not all service does a lot of good. This clinic is an opportunity to do some pretty good service with a reasonable investment in time and resources.”

He dates the history of the OneWorld night clinic to the early 1970s, when the late Raymond Shaddy, DDS’53, fostered the school’s relationship with the Indian Chacano Center, which later evolved into the OneWorld Community Health Center. “Dr. Shaddy began bringing patients to the school in the evenings,” Wilwerding says. “I seem to recall that it was $2 per visit in those days.”

Today, patients at the night clinic pay a $20 flat fee for two hours of dentistry.

Wilwerding was a dental student from 1973 to 1977 and volunteered at the clinic. As a faculty member in the 1980s, he again volunteered — and he was hooked.

He is especially grateful to Dave Williams, DDS, associate professor of oral and maxillofacial surgery, for helping out the last seven or eight years. In fact, he has dubbed the retired Air Force oral surgeon “St. Williams.”

“We do a lot of surgery — extractions — and the general dentists like myself used to supervise this along with the regular treatment. It was a time crunch, and we were occasionally getting into difficult situations.”

“One day, Dr. Williams told me he was taking a night course in Ignatian spirituality. I told him this was the most Ignatian thing he could do, and he started to come to the night clinics, and has been a regular.”

He says Williams “allows us more time to work, does a better job with the surgery and reinforces the surgical principles that he teaches during the day.” He adds, “He is totally humble and has a great sense of humor. He is just a wonderful person.”

Williams oversees anywhere from three to 13 extractions per session. He is guided by his belief that “these people deserve the same type of treatments that everyone else does.”

He says he derives great personal satisfaction from helping an underserved patient population. “The clinic is also an example to students that we need to voluntarily provide professional work without payment or at a reduced fee as a public service,” Williams says.

The legacy of the clinic lies not only with the thousands of satisfied patients who have come to the School of Dentistry in the evenings, but especially with the graduates who have taken its lessons into their lives and practices.

Grades who are similar to student leader Schrack, who is a living example of Creighton’s Jesuit, Catholic value of service to others. Schrack says he plans on being an active member “of whatever community I may be in, regularly taking a fair amount of time out of practice to address the needs of the underserved, both here in the U.S. and abroad.”
Encouraging American Indian Dentists

By Rick Davis, BA’88

Organization Founded by Creighton Alumnus Celebrates 25th Anniversary

George Blue Spruce Jr., DDS’56, America’s first recognized American Indian dentist, feels a sense of awe and wonder that the Society of American Indian Dentists — a national organization he helped found — celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. The opening session for the Society’s 25th annual conference was held in July at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

“I’m very, very proud of that achievement,” Blue Spruce says of the anniversary, speaking by phone from his home in Phoenix. And that’s saying something for Blue Spruce, whose life is filled with achievements.

He served as an assistant U.S. surgeon general from 1981 to 1986, during the tenure of C. Everett Koop. He was the dentist for the crew of the USS Nautilus, the first nuclear-powered submarine, in 1957, for which he earned a citation from the U.S. Navy. He was inducted into the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame in 1996 — as the first and only tennis player honoree. He wrote the original draft of Title 1 of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act in 1974, which provides scholarships for American Indian students. And the list goes on.

But his greatest legacy may be the American Indian youth he has mentored — showing them that they can pursue a career in the health professions and make a difference in their communities and the world.

And that’s where the Society of American Indian Dentists comes in.

The organization has provided a vehicle to reach more people and to bring national attention to the need for more American Indian dentists.

He says there were only about 20 American Indian dentists nationwide when the organization launched in 1990. Today, he says, there are upwards of 250. But there is a need for more.

Blue Spruce, who served as president of the Society for its first 16 years, says the current numbers represent roughly one American Indian dentist for every 32,000 American Indians. “We really need about 3,200,” he says.

The 84-year-old Blue Spruce — who published his autobiography, Searching for My Destiny, in 2009 — continues to remain active, encouraging students, especially American Indian students, to pursue college.

It was a message his parents — full-blooded members of the Pueblo tribe, neither of whom spoke English or had any formal education — instilled in their three children. “My parents realized that a formal education was the only way to succeed in the dominant society,” Blue Spruce says.

Blue Spruce attended St. Michael’s High School in his native Santa Fe, N.M., before coming to Creighton in the fall of 1949. He arrived after a 27-hour Greyhound bus trip — the only American Indian on campus.

He says he was shy and lacked self-esteem. He felt alone. He couldn’t call home because his parents did not have a phone. He found his stride after joining the Creighton tennis team his sophomore year. He was named a team captain. He was interviewed by the school newspaper. He earned a measure of notoriety on campus.

“My self-esteem grew, and I turned that enthusiasm into my studies,” Blue Spruce says.

Blue Spruce would later serve on the School of Dentistry’s Alumni Advisory Board, including a term as chair in 1989; bring two Society conferences to Creighton in 1991 and 2010; and receive Creighton’s prestigious Alumni Achievement Citation in 1984. “I am extremely proud of my Creighton education,” he says.

While strong academics are essential, he says, he uses athletics (he can show the gold medals won at the Phoenix and Arizona State Senior Olympics) as a way to connect with American Indian youth who may not even know what DDS stands for.

“Dentistry is still a very unknown profession, except for the fact that American Indians need dental care. They know they need dental care,” Blue Spruce says. “I worked on 14 different reservations when I was with the Indian Health Service for 21 years, and my experience was that the people wished there were more American Indian dentists.”

Blue Spruce and his Society of American Indian Dentists continue to try to make that wish come true.

The organization has provided a vehicle to reach more people and to bring national attention to the need for more American Indian dentists.

Following in the Footsteps

Current American Indian Student Thankful, Looks to Give Back

Creighton dental student Adrian Sandoval, BS’11, a member of the Navajo tribe who grew up in Gallup, N.M., attended the 25th annual conference of the Society of American Indian Dentists this summer. To him, George Blue Spruce Jr., DDS’56, is more than a mentor. “I look at him like my grandfather,” Sandoval says.

Like Blue Spruce, Sandoval found the initial adjustment to college life and Omaha difficult. “That first semester was really tough,” Sandoval says. Poor grades threatened to derail his dream of becoming a dentist, a dream formed through a connection with another mentor — his family dentist, junior high basketball coach and Creighton alumnus, Nick DeSantis, BA’76, DDS’80.

A counselor’s direct, probing question, “What are you here for?” gave Sandoval a “reboot.” Tutoring help from a Creighton friend and a renewed commitment from Sandoval put him back on track. He participated in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Dental Pipeline Program, shadowing Creighton dental students, the summer between his junior and senior undergraduate years. Following graduation, he was accepted into and completed Creighton’s Pre-Dental Post-Baccalaureate Program, before successfully applying to the School of Dentistry. Now, he looks to give back to others.

He regularly visits area reservations, encouraging high school students to stay in school and assisting them with college scholarship applications.

“Mentoring is something of an honor,” Sandoval says. “There were so many people who assisted me on my path.” He also volunteers at the Fred and LeRoy Health and Wellness Center in Omaha, a public health clinic dedicated to serving American Indians. A recipient of an Indian Health Service Scholarship, Sandoval, a senior, will continue to work at the clinic upon graduation. And he remains appreciative of the role the Society of American Indian Dentists has played in his professional life.

Once I graduate, I wish to become one of them and give back to other aspiring American Indian dentists.”
Serving Rural Nebraska

By Nichole Jelinek

Two Creighton dental graduates find small-town practice rewarding

While reports tell of a shortage of dentists serving rural America, two Creighton University School of Dentistry graduates have found success and fulfillment caring for rural populations in Nebraska.

In fact, they couldn’t imagine being anywhere else. Both Dean Cope, DDS’93, and Frank Patterson, DDS’11, credit Creighton for providing them with a quality education that stressed serving those in need. And both have testified before the Nebraska Legislature on the important role Creighton plays in educating dentists across the state.

Did You Know?

Creighton ranks first among private dental schools nationwide for the percentage of graduates from 2005 to 2014 who are practicing in rural communities across the United States, according to a report published in the October 2015 issue of The Journal of the American Dental Association.
Dental Nightmare to Dentist

Dean Cope, DDS’93, knew as a teenager that he wanted to be a dentist. “As a child, I had horrible teeth. I was something of a dental nightmare,” admits Cope.

Quality care from his family dentist, along with good oral hygiene, not only improved Cope’s oral health, but it boosted his confidence. Becoming a dentist — especially a small-town dentist, where access to care can be limited — was his way of giving back.

Cope, who graduated from the School of Dentistry in 1993, opened his practice in small-town Cambridge, located in southwestern Nebraska, in 1996. He sees a wide range of patients, including those from neighboring rural Nebraska towns — some of whom travel from up to 90 miles away. And he provides all manner of care, from the routine to the complex. He considers serving rural Nebraska a privilege.

“It’s rewarding and an honor when families embrace the importance of oral health, but I’m also here to listen to my patients and to hear their stories,” Cope says. For Cope, receiving letters of thanks from children he has treated is one of the most rewarding parts of his job.

Cope says his Creighton education instilled in him a desire to give back — to both his community and the University. He has served as chair of the School of Dentistry’s Alumni Advisory Board and has volunteered with the Boy Scouts, the Lions Club and his church in Cambridge. Cope has served as president of the Chamber of Commerce and is active with the Cambridge School Board, having also served as board president for the last six years.

An Investment in Community

Frank Patterson, DDS’11, maintains two practices in rural Nebraska — in Valentine and Ainsworth — along with a practice in Winner, S.D. He draws patients from the Nebraska Sandhills and south-central South Dakota.

After graduating from the School of Dentistry in 2011, Patterson researched and prayed about the right places to build his practices. The demographics of rural Nebraska drew him west, to where some people could drive up to six hours round-trip for dental care.

Patterson says the need was great. He has since made hospital dentistry available in south-central South Dakota and has brought an orthodontic clinic to Ainsworth and Valentine.

Patterson has a 10-year plan to have more practices in rural areas of the two states because he finds rural practice rewarding. It goes beyond dental care, he says; it’s about an investment in a community.

“It’s hope for these towns, and a chance to support organizations such as FFA, 4-H and the development of other youth programs,” says Patterson. “It’s rewarding when you realize the change in the community and its residents, and that you can be part of that change.”

Patterson has served as a member of the volunteer fire department and is active in Boy Scouts, the Rotary Club and with his local church youth groups. He says he is grateful to Creighton for accepting him and for giving him a chance for success.
Dennis Higginbotham, DDS’67, was honored with the Alumni Association’s 2015 Alumni Merit Award for the School of Dentistry during Homecoming activities in September.

The annual award recognizes outstanding alumni for distinguished service to the community and University and for exemplifying Creighton’s credo of being men and women for others.

Higginbotham says that it was through the influence of his late brother, Robert Higginbotham, DDS’66, that he enrolled at the Creighton University School of Dentistry.

“Creighton was a great fit for me, and I learned to love so many of my teaching faculty,” says Higginbotham. “They cared and they were willing to invest in you if you had a desire to learn. They were very special to me as a student.”

The summer after Higginbotham graduated in 1967, he practiced alongside his brother. It was during this time that Higginbotham says he was again influenced and inspired by Robert’s work. He says he was witness to the death of his brother was a huge loss for the entire family.

“It not only lost a brother, but my mentor and sounding board for any dental concerns,” says Higginbotham. “He was a gifted and compassionate dentist. After a very brief period of time (his patients) knew that they had a friend and gifted dentist to provide them with compassionate care.”

Higginbotham made the decision to close his practice in 1993 to teach full time. He has taught in the School of Dentistry since 1972, in both full-time and part-time positions.

He has served the School of Dentistry in various roles — associate professor, chair and administrator. For almost 30 years, he was the director of continuing education and has played a productive role in more than two dozen University committees.

As a faculty member, Higginbotham earned a reputation for being a compassionate and caring professor, evidenced by numerous teaching awards. In 2013, he was honored with the University’s Distinguished Faculty Award.

Higginbotham says working at Creighton University has been most rewarding, always stimulating and a pleasure beyond measure.
AlumniNotes

1971
John J. Kirby, DDS, Hillsborough, Calif., has participated in the annual Mending Faces Medical Mission to Kaibo, Philippines, with fellow Creighton graduates Christophor M. Bisty, BS’77, DDS’81, and Dr. Michelle M. “Mimi” Wong, BS’89. Mending Faces is a nonprofit organization providing pro bono cleft lip/palate surgeries to impoverished children affected with this problem.

1974
Thomas L. Ludwig, BS’69, DDS, Marland, Iowa, currently serves as president of the Iowa Dental Association. His term is for 2015-16.

1980
Randy K. Nauyak, DDS, Wichita, Kan., has had several articles published in the Journal of the American Orthodontic Society (JADO). “Exploring the Two First Keys of Class II Correction: Maxillary Arch Development and Maxillary Molar Position” (Fall 2016); “Understanding and Applying Mulligan Mechanics in the Horizontal and Vertical Planes of Space” (Winter 2015); “Face, TMJ Joint, and Teeth Considerations When Performing Orthodontic and Orthopedic Therapy” (spring 2015); “Key Orthodontic II Correction: Proper Overbite and Overjet; Part I” (summer 2015); and “Key Three in Class II Correction: Proper Overbite and Overjet; Part II” (fall 2015).

1981
Christopher M. Bisty, BS’77, DDS, Golden, Colo., has participated in the annual Mending Faces Medical Mission to Kaibo, Philippines, with fellow Creighton graduates John J. Kirby, DDS’81, and Dr. Michelle M. “Mimi” Wong, BS’89. Mending Faces is a nonprofit organization providing pro bono cleft lip/palate surgeries to impoverished children affected with this problem.

1983
A. Art Kaslow, BA’78, DDS, Solvang, Calif., has retired from the United States Army Reserve Dental Corps after 37 years of service. Kaslow started his Army career as an ROTC cadet at Creighton in 1974, served five years active duty, and obtained the rank of colonel. He served in tours/mobilizations to Germany, Central America, and the U.S. In the last decade of his career he served as the commander of various dental units while deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Kaslow has maintained a general dental practice in Solvang for the last 31 years.

1985
Tracie E. Keller, BS’81, DDS, Colorado Springs, Colo., was named one of the Top 25 Women in Dentistry by Dental Products Report in September 2014.

1986
Mary Ellen McLean, DDS, and Paul M. Cizik were married on May 3, 2015, and are living in South Lyon, Mich.

1987
Paul A. Racicipp Jr., BS’42, DDS, Brooklyn, NY, was named president of the Bay Ridge Dental Society in Brooklyn.

1996
Justin D. Phillips, DDS, Windsor, Calif., was voted Best Dentist in Sonoma County for 2014 in The Press Democrat’s Readers Choice Awards. This was the second year in a row that Phillips received the award. He currently practices at Phillips Family Dental.

2004
Debra King, DDS, and Justin Schmidt were married Dec. 17, 2014, and are living in Chicago. They also welcomed a son, Dylan James, on July 20, 2015.

2010
Patrick R. Wachtler, BA’09, DDS, and Dr. Chelsea N. Krupp were married on Feb. 8, 2014, and are living in Omaha.

In Memoriam

John MacRae Williams, DDS’44, BS’44, Omaha, Nov. 8, 2014.
Ralph G. Turkel, DDS’45, Omaha, Jan. 28, 2015.
Joseph A. Trelo, DDS’48, Omaha, Dec. 6, 2014.
Arthu T. Matte Sr., DDS’54, Albuquerque, N.M., July 1, 2015.
Fred A. Celis, DDS’60, San Jose, Calif., April 5, 2015.
Charles A. Ballie Jr., DDS’61, Keri, Alaska, June 24, 2014.
Robert J. Maley, DDS’64, BS’72, Centennial, Colo., Sept. 20, 2014.
Benjamin P. Costa, DDS’65,85, Browningfield, Colo., July 12, 2014.
Gary A. Epstein, DDS’67, Omaha, April 21, 2015.
Michael F. Alvarez, DDS’73, Bozeman, Mont., July 31, 2015.
Dean J. Danek, DDS’91, Millbrooks, Calif., Sept. 8, 2014.
Katherine Coffey Olechowski, DDS’06, Omaha, June 4, 2015.

Utke Receives AGD Mastership Award

Calvin Utke, DDS’84, received the Academy of General Dentistry’s (AGD) Mastership Award during the 2015 Annual Meeting in June.

The Mastership Award is the AGD’s highest honor and one of the most respected designations within the profession. To earn this award, Utke completed 1,100 hours of dental continuing education in 18 disciplines or categories. As a mastership recipient, Utke joins more than 2,200 active AGD masters across the U.S., in Canada and internationally who have gone above and beyond the basic requirements to care for their patients’ oral health.

“This award requires an extraordinary amount of time, effort and unflagging commitment to continuing education and Dr. Utke should be commended for his efforts,” says AGD Immediate Past President W. Carter Brown, DMD.

Utke has practiced in Colorado Springs, Colo., at the Flintridge Dental Center since 1985. He recently completed his tenure as president of the Colorado Dental Association and currently practices full time, along with associate Kirsten Zitzchokovski, DDS.

CU Dental Experience

Share your professional experience with a Creighton University undergraduate student considering a career in dentistry. Learn more and register today to provide shadowing opportunities through the Creighton EDGE.

blogs.creighton.edu/edge/shadowing/dental

Entire Class Participates in Making a Gift

Robert Wetzel, DDS’15, class president and recipient of the Dr. and Mrs. Philip J. Maschka Award for Ethics in Dentistry, presents a check to James Howard, DDS, senior associate dean for clinical and external affairs, on behalf of the graduating class of 2015. The presentation was made during the School of Dentistry’s Hooding Ceremony in May. The School of Dentistry is pleased to announce that 100 percent of the class participated in making a gift in support of the capital needs of the school.

Do you have alumni news to share? Please send to alumninews@creighton.edu.
Make a Difference
Volunteer with ILAC
June 21-July 24, 2016

Contact Terry Wilwerding, DDS’77, MS’00, MS’08 — 402.280.5081, tmjw@creighton.edu
or James O’Meara, BA’82, DDS’86 — 402.280.3420, jomeara@creighton.edu

Read more about the ILAC program on Page 6.