The Official Journal of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry® etic De Volume 25 • Number 3
Fall Special Issue 2009

President's Message



ADVOCACY IS A RIGHTEOUS ACTION

Although I grew up in a metropolitan area, my family's vocation was "truck gardening." Tucked into an older part of the city by the Missouri River, our backyard consisted of 100 acres where we raised vegetables—not only to put food on the table, but also

to put clothes on our backs.

By virtue of our four-season climate, most of the work that provided our economic survival occurred during the summer months. We sold wholesale at a local fruit and vegetable commerce district, as well as to local grocery stores. However, most of our financial success came from our own retail vegetable stand next to our acreage.

A vast majority of our land was rented from the Union Pacific Railroad (UP), which commanded the respect and power granted to national economic giants of that era. A major rail line also ran by our house and carried all the coal necessary to power Omaha and parts of eastern Nebraska. Just as with our business, the summer was important to the UP, for during this time they built new lines of track, re-routed old lines, and repaired deteriorating ones.

During one summer in the early 1960s, UP decided it was the perfect time to replace the railway line by our house. Unfortunately for my family, this meant UP intended to shut down the road to our vegetable market for most of that summer. Without traffic, our business would be ruined and our income for the year would be severely endangered. Although my father lodged early protests in a politically correct manner, those requests fell on deaf ears. The well-being of a lower socioeconomic family scratching out a living in the dirt was far less important than the needs and desires of a major U.S. economic power focused on satisfying its shareholders. We were duly informed: The road was going to be closed, and that was that. Until...

...One day, when my Dad, perched high on the seat, started up the biggest of our five tractors, drove it over to the rail line, parked it square on the tracks, put the keys in his pocket, and refused to move. First, the local newspaper reporters appeared. Then a locomotive, pulling three-quarters of a mile of coal cars, came to a stop just short of my Dad's tractor. Shortly after the police were called, the radio reporters and television camera crews arrived.

Before long the entire story was laid out for all to see, and an objective examination of the issues took place.

It wasn't long before the UP work resumed—and it wasn't long before the vegetable stand in our backyard was humming with activity. How could these seemingly incompatible events occur at the same time? When confronted with the reality of what was right, UP decided it was justifiable to build a temporary road to our family's vegetable stand *before* starting the work on their new access line.

It was an easy feat for UP to accomplish and took only a couple of days, as their work crews and equipment were already on site. Why did my Dad have to park the tractor over the tracks and literally stop locomotives before UP would consider a more reasonable alternative? I believe it is because when big business charges forward with a project, they fail to understand—or, in some cases, don't even care about—the implications for those impacted by their actions.

I have thought many times about my Dad's resolve during that chapter of my life. Where did he find the strength to stand up for his best interests and for what he believed was right, especially when we leased our land from the very entity he confronted? When I asked him about it, he simply replied, "You always have to stand up for a cause when you feel you are right."

Lately his words come to mind when I see our Academy fight for member rights, especially the right to inform the public and our patients of the expertise, training, and experience gained through our membership in the AACD.

One can certainly understand why the American Dental Association (ADA), in representing all dentists, has taken a position that all dentists have the right to call themselves "cosmetic dentists" regardless of any special training or unique skills. The fallout from the general population of dentists would be enormous were the ADA to adopt a different stance.

In a similar line of thinking, the AACD, in representing all our members, has taken a position that Academy members, who have pursued additional training and demonstrated skills and expertise over and above the basics, should be allowed to promote that training and accomplishment in their communities. Shouldn't the value of an objective examination process with positive results trump self-proclaimed marketing hype?

continued on page 12

President's Message continued

Here's a common scenario: A new patient comes to the practice complaining that a previous dentist's work did not meet his or her esthetic expectations. The patient reports having chosen the previous "cosmetic dentist" (or one whose advertising suggested some special expertise or skill in cosmetic dentistry), but maintains the dentist didn't appear to know how to achieve the desired results. The patient is confused, aggravated, and beginning to distrust dentistry in general.

Many State Boards have created barriers to marketing and advertising, which, by following ADA mandates and recommendations, make it difficult for patients to find a dentist with specific training and expertise in esthetics. These boards support laws and write regulations that specifically prohibit informing the public about any credentials related to specialized achievement outside the specialty areas the ADA previously identified. Therefore, a patient can readily find an orthodontist or a pediatric dentist, but has trouble sifting through those best qualified to provide sophisticated cosmetic dental procedures.

Last year, the AACD joined with the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) and the American Board of Implantology (ABOI) in support of the American Academy of Implant Dentistry (AAID) lawsuits in Colorado, California, and Florida supporting our collective contention that the public has the right to know about legitimate credentials in dentistry that fall outside the original ADA dental specialties.

I am happy to report that those cases were settled in a manner that allows our members to publicly exhibit their AACD membership level. I am also proud to report that our board of directors has endorsed continuing these advocacy efforts. Patients deserve the right to examine and understand the difference between objective examination results and self-proclaimed expertise. A patient's right to know will ultimately decide this issue.

The AACD leadership pledges to *all* our members that we will continue to fight for the right to inform your community of your efforts to excel in the field of cosmetic dentistry. It is simply the right thing to do. We will do this through advocacy, education, and legal means, when necessary. For now, we'll "leave the tractor in the barn."

My best wishes to you and yours,

Michael R. Sesemann, DDS

President, AACD Accredited Fellow Member (FAACD)

GBAS Volunteer

