



EDUCATING PEOPLE FIRST: DR. ART DUGONI '43

The next time you drive by University of the Pacific's Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry just north of the InterContinental Hotel on 5th Street in San Francisco, take some pride that you are connected to the man whose name is emblazoned larger than life on the school's facade.

Dr. Dugoni, at age 94, also happens to be one of the foremost dentists, orthodontists, and educators in the world. Two decades ago, he was elected to the FDI World Dental Federation, which is limited to 30 of the best in dentistry around the world, and that is just one high point of his storied career, which began at the outbreak of World War II.

In 2004, the San Francisco native and 1943 St. James graduate—the precursor to Archbishop

Riordan High School—became the first and only person in the U.S. or Canada to have a dental school named in his honor while serving as dean.

Though he retired as dean in 2006, he continues to work to advance his profession as dean emeritus, professor of orthodontics, and senior executive for development. He suffered his biggest loss in 2015 when his wife of 66 years, Kaye, died at age 89. These days he finds joy spending time with their seven children, 15 grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. A couple of years ago, he again was blessed that God and Kaye conspired together to send him the second love of his life, Cathie Perga, as a partner and best friend to share his remaining years.

Devotion to Family

His devotion to family started the day he was born. His extended Italian family lived either on or near Russian Hill's Glover Street. "Everyone on the block spoke Italian and the vast majority were my relatives," said Dr. Dugoni, whose father Arthur had immigrated from Torino at 17.

A devout Catholic, Dr. Dugoni recalled an event that he describes as a miracle, one that happened right after his First Communion just outside Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. His mother couldn't go as she was ill, but she gave him a few coins for the collection box and an umbrella as it was a rainy day. After making his First Communion, he looked for the coins but couldn't find them. "I was a fairly serious young man, so I went to a nun and told her that I had lost the coins. She told me to go back into church and pray to St. Jude. I did that, came out from church, started walking up the hill, and it started to rain again. I opened up the umbrella and the coins fell on my head. I was certain that was my first miracle."

His family later bought a house in Potrero Hill where his academic excellence earned him a full scholarship at St. Ignatius. After a year there, he transferred to St. James. "I wanted to attend a school closer to my home, and I felt uncomfortable being on scholarship. I wanted to pay my own way, so I worked at a neighborhood butcher shop to earn enough to pay my tuition."

At St. James, the school's principal Bro. John McCluskey, SM, encouraged him to pursue public speaking and debating. He won several elocution contests while also excelling at basketball and track and field, setting a school record in the 880-yard dash.

Shortly after the war broke out, Bro. McCluskey encouraged Dr. Dugoni and two other classmates to start college early at USF in order to qualify for officer candidate school. He later transferred to Gonzaga University and, after being commissioned as an ensign, began his dental studies at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, where he studied for two years and played basketball—becoming the leading scorer in his conference—before serving at Farragut Naval Training Station in Idaho, where he continued his dental training.

Return to the Bay Area

After the war ended, he returned to San Francisco and continued his education at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which later merged with UOP. Others grew aware of his skill as a dental student and as an orator, and his classmates elected him to serve as student body president. As a debater, he won over competitors from Stanford and Harvard and later became valedictorian for his class. All the while, he continued his efforts to put himself through school—working again at the butcher shop, as a coach at the Columbia Park Boys' Club, and at a soda fountain on Market Street.

He followed the advice of his dental school dean to re-enlist in the U.S. Navy, which was starting its first general practice hospital-based residency program. He served as an intern at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, where he continued his training and his skill on the courts, becoming captain of his basketball team and playing teams from nearby naval bases and colleges.

After finishing that program, he drove to Spokane, Wash., to propose to Kaye Groo, whom he met during his days at Gonzaga. The two married and eventually moved to Bethesda, Md., where Dr. Dugoni studied at the U.S. Naval Dental School and once again competed on the basketball court. "The coach, Fearless Frank Frates, nicknamed me 'brooms' because I was a former high jumper and could clear the rebounds off the backboard."

His next assignment took the couple to the Great Lakes Naval Base in Illinois, where Dr. Dugoni trained to do oral and maxillofacial surgery. After the Korean War broke out, he landed at Camp Pendleton. "By the time I got there, it was deserted, as the First Marine Division had just left for Korea." There, he found the facilities lacking and designed a new facility for oral and maxillofacial surgery.

At the war's end, he returned to San Francisco, where Dean Ernest Sloman of the College of Physicians and Surgeons offered him a job, one that would allow him to practice half-time in a practice he shared with Dr. John Tocchini. There, he conducted a post-graduate clinic teaching program for general dentists and pediatric dentists

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about high-speed instrumentation and quadrant dentistry. “This was a huge step forward from doing one restoration at a time,” he noted. “I was also fortunate to be a pioneer in the development of high-speed instruments and air turbines going from 5,000 to 450,000 RPMs.”

He eventually focused on pediatric dentistry before beginning a new venture—applying for a master’s program in orthodontics at the University of Washington. Just as he finished that program, Dr. Tocchini, by then the new dean of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, invited him to serve as chair of the orthodontic department at his alma mater. Because the pay was so little, he took up private practice part-time in a period that saw the school merge with UOP. He eventually entered full-time private practice in a state-of-the-art facility in South San Francisco, which he referred to as the Mayo Clinic of the West. “It was the ultimate group dental practice,” Dr. Dugoni recalled. “Our two buildings featured more than 30 dental operatories. It was one of the first and most modern group practices of its time as it included our own central x-ray facility, our own gold and ceramic laboratories, and an area for mentoring young associates. As the group practice grew and developed, we brought expert clinicians and educators into our facility for our own private continuing education courses and also traveled to various sites as a team to hear other speakers.”

An Educator is Born

That latter part proved to be one of the highlights of his time in dentistry. “I was always interested in teaching and learning. A teacher’s influence can be far-reaching as we affect the lives of our students.”

To hone his skills as an educator, he took courses at Stanford and Wharton. As he grew in this field, he realized the impact of a humanistic-based education. “I experienced and observed many educators over the years who taught by fear and intimidation. I realized that it was far better to teach by inspiring students to grow and flourish as they excelled in their studies.”

Between 1969 and 1978, he returned to teaching part-time as an adjunct professor while continuing his practice and was named dean of the School of Dentistry in 1978. Despite the low salary, he took

the job and continued his practice one day a week to supplement his income and support a family that had grown to seven children.

Looking back over his years as dean, he feels “blessed to have chosen this path. When I stepped into the role, the man and the moment met. Over the next 28 years, thanks to a dedicated faculty and staff and awesome alumni, we were able to transform the dental school from a distant point of light on the edge of the Pacific Coast to the very epicenter of dental education. We turned a unique three-year degree program into an admired model of efficiency, and we made the humanistic teaching model in dental education the gold standard.”

He pioneered innovative programs, including an international dental program, a graduate program in oral and maxillofacial surgery, the establishment of the MSD degree, the creation of the first “White Coat Ceremony” for dental schools, a dental hygiene program, professional education and leadership programs for faculty and staff, and the creation of honors programs on UOP’s Stockton campus to accelerate entrance into the dental



On May 10, 2008, Dr. Dugoni received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor that recognizes individuals of all backgrounds who serve to strengthen the country.



The facade of UOP Dental School on 5th Street in San Francisco.

school. He also created 100 endowments with three endowed chairs and nine endowed professorships.

For all of his efforts, he has received numerous honors and awards, including the William J. Gies Award from the American Dental Education Association for outstanding achievement as a dental educator. He was also named the first recipient of the Paragon Award from the American Student Dental Association.

The Dugoni Legacy

For Dr. Dugoni, the focus isn't on his own honors but on helping future dentists and orthodontists. He is currently working to create an endowment for scholarships for all UOP dental students to reduce any debt they may incur. He has named this project the "Legacy Flywheel" and based it on the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. In it, he asks faculty members and alumni to donate at least 10 percent of their estate back to the school that made them successful in their profession. "So far, the results have been outstanding, and many individuals are pledging much higher percentages."

Even at 94, he continues to give lectures and seminars on leadership, ethics, professionalism, orthodontics, and organized dentistry. Four years ago, UOP published *Quest for Excellence: The Arthur A. Dugoni Story* by Martin Brown. The book recalls the words of the School of Dentistry's commencement speaker in 2014, Dr. Ron Redmond, a UOP Regent, who noted that "one caring and committed educator can make all the

difference, if you understand that giants give you a boost to see what, for you, might be an uncertain future. Art Dugoni is the reason for my seeing into the future. He took the time to care and talk to me about my career options. He made a difference that enhanced my life and later the lives of my family."

Valedictorian Kristy Rodgers included one of her favorite quotes by Dr. Dugoni in her speech that day. "As my first year started, I wanted to do the very best that I could but was overwhelmed with the demands. While trying to survive, I attended a lecture by Dr. Dugoni where he shared the quote, 'We build people, and along the way, they become doctors.'"

Those future medical professionals will face, thanks to Dr. Dugoni and his colleagues, a future of radical change. "The next 10 to 20 years will be an outstanding time for healthcare innovation and achievements," Dr. Dugoni noted. "We are in a time of transition that will be challenging and daunting, but also awesome. The good news is that we can be a partner and leader in that change. We are approaching a tipping point as artificial intelligence has developed rapidly in the last decade due to major increases in computing power and the ability to store and process massive amounts of data.

"What does all this mean? Technology has continuously transformed our world in amazing ways, and the result is that we will be living longer and more productively than at any time in our history. My suggestion is that you embrace the change and take it dancing into the future."