

A LIFE OF FIRSTS

William R. Laney, D.M.D., is internationally recognized as a pioneer in the field of prosthodontics — a dental specialty that restores or replaces missing teeth and orofacial structures with artificial parts or prostheses. Dr. Laney was Mayo Clinic's first prosthodontist and the first division chair for prosthodontics. He was also one of the first clinicians to introduce modern oral maxillofacial implant technology into the United States and the first editor of the *International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Implants*.

A 1954 graduate of the University of Oregon Dental School, Dr. Laney completed his residency in prosthodontics at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Iowa City and earned a postdoctoral master's degree from the University of Iowa following service in the U.S. Air Force.

Dr. Laney chaired the Mayo Clinic Department of Dentistry from 1976 through 1985. Under his leadership, new collaborations were formed among prosthodontics and neurosurgery, plastic surgery and head and neck surgery at Mayo Clinic. The department grew rapidly.

"I credit Mayo Clinic for much of the growth and success that we experienced in prosthodontics during that time," says Dr. Laney. "The integration and collaboration across specialties at Mayo is nearly seamless. The ability to do practice, education and research under one roof is a huge advantage in this field, and that enabled our program to expand."

In 1966, Dr. Laney established the Prosthodontics Residency Program at Mayo Clinic. "It's one of my proudest accomplishments," he says. More than 25

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"I was really fascinated by the field, and I got involved early," says Dr. Laney. He received a postdoctoral grant from the American Cancer Society to study maxillofacial prosthetics for cancer and related diseases in New York in 1959. In 1960, he joined the Mayo Clinic Rochester staff in the Department of Dental Specialties.

Recruited to establish the prosthodontics dental specialty at Mayo Clinic, Dr. Laney built the practice from the ground up. "At the time, there was a shortage of people to take care of patients who had been treated for conditions such as cleft palate, or following head and neck surgery," says Dr. Laney. "There was no one on staff to restore oral health, function and appearance to those people."

"Dr. Laney is the classic Mayo doctor — 'the needs of the patient come first,'" says Sreenivas Koka, D.D.S., Ph.D., a prosthodontist at Mayo Clinic. "He is sincere, humble, dedicated and highly respected — someone whom anyone would aspire to be like."

Colleagues say that Dr. Laney leads by example. He does it quietly and without attempting to draw attention to himself, they say, but when he speaks — people listen.

residents have completed the program, which has been lengthened from a three-year to a four-year program — now admitting one resident every two years.

When Dr. Laney retired in 1992, both the Division of Prosthodontics and the Prosthodontics Residency Program had established Mayo Clinic as a world leader in the field.

"There is such respect for this man — especially from former fellows and residents, who always make it a point to meet and speak with him whenever we attend conferences and events," says his wife, LaDonna McGee Laney.

In 2005, that admiration took the form of a special tribute to Dr. Laney. To honor his immeasurable contributions to Mayo Clinic and to the specialty of prosthodontics, several alumni and friends proposed establishing an endowment and a fund which will carry Dr. Laney's name. The goal is to honor his legacy in perpetuity.

"I was totally floored when Dr. Koka approached me," says Dr. Laney. "I am so honored and humbled to have this established in my name. But more importantly, it will

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LaDonna McGee Laney and William R. Laney, D.M.D.



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be a great thing for residents, making funds available for education, research and scholarly travel.”

As members of The Doctors Mayo Society Leaders Circle, Dr. and Mrs. Laney are passing on the generational mission of philanthropy — both professionally and personally. Their family has also made gifts to the Laney Endowment.

“We think it is important for the next generation to understand what it means to give back,” says Mrs. Laney. “In some ways, the activities surrounding the Laney Endowment helps the children realize just how much their Dad has accomplished and what it means to the field of prosthodontics.”

PHILANTHROPY IN DR. LANEY’S HONOR

The William R. Laney Endowment honors Dr. Laney in perpetuity alongside the Laney Fund for Prosthodontic Education. The Laney Fund provides a mechanism to fund activities immediately, while the Laney Endowment grows.

PROVIDING THE VISION

It took just a little over one year for the alumni of Mayo Clinic Division of Prosthodontics, led by Sreenivas Koka, D.D.S., Ph.D., to raise gifts and pledges necessary to meet the required \$100,000 to formally establish the William R. Laney Endowment for Prosthodontic Education.

Dr. Koka, age 40, joined Mayo Clinic in 2005 as a consultant in the Division of Prosthodontics. Born and raised in England, Dr. Koka completed his dental degree in 1989 and prosthodontic residency in 1991 at the University of Michigan Dental School, Ann Arbor.

“Dr. Laney (Bill) established Mayo as one of the clinical and intellectual centers of prosthodontics around the world. What he started and developed is one of the main reasons I am here,” says Dr. Koka. “Bill’s passion and legacy make people like me especially proud to work at Mayo Clinic.”

Establishing the Laney Endowment is a win-win situation, according to Dr. Koka. “Not only does it honor



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Associate Professor of Dentistry

Bill, it also gives people the opportunity to show how much respect they have for him in a way that they know he finds meaningful,” says Dr. Koka.

Leadership gifts from the three current prosthodontic consultants and their spouses launched the endowment halfway to the goal. Leading the initial effort were Dr. Koka and his wife, Karen; Steven E. Eckert, D.D.S., and his wife, Susan (Prosthodontics 1988); and Alan B. Carr, D.M.D., and his wife, Jonna (Prosthodontics 1986).

Considering the small number of prosthodontic alumni and friends, the generous response is all the more impressive. Dr. Koka is appreciative, but not surprised, that his colleagues would be so willing to participate.

“I believe that you don’t have to teach people to be generous; I just think you have to provide an avenue that allows people to express their innate generosity,” says Dr. Koka.