

Past President George Sferra's remarks on Friendship as an aspect of Academy Fellowship

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I was fortunate enough to begin my dental career practicing in the same office as my father. At that time an informal group of colleagues met daily for lunch in the dining room at the Barbizon Hotel. There were no reservations, but the staff kept a table reserved for a core group of regulars. My father was part of that group and as the junior associate I was instantly included.

There was a friendly collegial attitude among them which as the new kid I found especially admirable. Besides my Dad, and me the group at various times included John Traugut, George Lyons, Joe Gibson, Ken Schmidt, Bill Galvin, Jack Putnam and John Stansfield. Brendan Boylan and Ed McNulty would occasionally drop by and shortly after I started to attend, Bob Karsten and Aukse Trojanis were introduced. Later, Guy Minoli, Gene Farone, Frank Andolino and Greg Chotkowski attended.

After several months of practicing together, my Dad arranged for me to attend a meeting of the New York Academy of Dentistry. At that point in my career, I lacked the confidence that comes with experience and was frankly a bit shy. I must admit that I was not anxious to attend another dental meeting at my father's insistence. He informed me that as a member of the Board of Directors he would have to head over early so I would have to locate the meeting venue and register myself. To make matters worse, he would be sitting on the dais that evening. So I

resigned myself to dining as an outsider with a group of strangers trying to make small talk. I wasn't familiar with the meeting location and I arrived a bit late but when I entered the room where the collation was being held, I found a cluster of my familiar lunch companions who robustly welcomed me into their circle. Over the course of the evening several more made sure to come over and greet me. I was invited to join them at their table and was pleasantly surprised at what an enjoyable evening it had become.

When I have considered proposing new members, or refer to the Academy generally, I often say that it's not another Dental Society but a Society of Dentists... I'm not very creative so I doubt that I coined that phrase myself, but I think it very aptly describes the New York Academy of Dentistry.



Of the 16 people mentioned earlier in that lunch group, 9 either had served or would be elected to the Presidency of the New York Academy of Dentistry. Two were Directors of hospital Dental Program at major hospitals in New York City. All served or volunteered either as instructors on hospital staffs or local Dental Schools or on major committees in organized dentistry. And here I must circle back to the comments made at prior meetings by President Julie Connolly and Past Presidents Tom Connolly and James Hudson about mentorship and professional outreach. Through their friendship, these individuals were a great source of knowledge and wisdom for me. Not just about the technical aspects of dentistry but about the proper and ethical treatment of patients and they showed by example that it was incumbent on me to contribute voluntarily to the profession and the greater community at large.



We are all aware of the personal friendships we have formed through the Academy and I think we all value them, but although it comprises an integral role in Academy membership it is seldom spoken of, so I was very pleased to be able to address this topic tonight.