

JT News

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***** Southwestern Medical School's First Graduate Retires

DALLAS---Big news spreads like wildfire through small towns. And when folks in the small West Texas town of Cisco heard that Dr. Addy was retiring, the whole town was ablaze.

Dr. Ervin Addy, chief of staff at E.L. Graham Memorial Hospital, has been practicing medicine in Cisco since 1947. In fact, there have been times when Addy was the only doctor in town. Everybody in Cisco who knows him--and that's just about everybody in a town of 4,500 people--loves him.

To show their appreciation for his years of service to their families, the whole town gathered together recently for a reception in his honor.

That same reception also marked a milestone in the history of Southwestern Medical School--the retirement of the school's first graduate.

Ervin E. Addy Jr., 65, was the first of 61 graduates to walk across the stage and receive a medical degree from Southwestern in 1944. But he takes no credit for this historic role. "We were seated alphabetically," says Addy. "I just happened to be the first one."

Looking back on that day, Addy understandably is proud to have played such an important part in Southwestern's history. "It never occurred to me that the medical school would reach such heights," he says. "It truly has come to the forefront of attention as one of the significant medical schools in the country."

But the medical school didn't reach such prominence overnight. Graduation ceremonies for the first graduating class were held at Spence Junior High School on Capitol Street near downtown Dallas because there were no buildings on campus to accommodate the gathering. Spence Junior High still stands as a middle school and academy for talented and gifted students, but the medical school campus--as it was in 1944--is no more.

America was at war, and the campus itself was nothing more than a deteriorating cluster of barracks set up behind the old Parkland Hospital building on Oak Lawn. Baylor College of Medicine had packed up and moved to Houston, and Southwestern had recently come into existence as the only training ground for doctors in Dallas.

Many of the students, including Addy, belonged to the Army's Specialized Training Corps. "We had to muster for roll call every morning," he remembers. "And it was a race to get there on time. We were spread out all over the place. We didn't really have a campus."

"Though the underclassmen spent most of their time in the barracks, my class had already finished our pre-clinical years, and we were largely assigned to different hospitals. We had to check a bulletin board in the old Parkland building to find out where to go next."

(more)

Addy, page two

Addy attributes the school's growth and success to the strong faculty members who remained in Dallas--people like Dr. Edward H. Cary, for whom one of the present campus buildings is named. "Without his (Cary's) influence," says Addy, "I don't think Southwestern would have qualified as a 'class A' medical school."

And Addy is evidence that 'class A' medical schools turn out 'class A' doctors. Any of his patients will attest to that.

Delivering babies, stitching up chins and mending broken bones, Addy has been tending to the needs of Cisco families for as long as he or anybody else in town can remember.

"He's what you call an original house-caller type," says Dr. Tom Golemon, also a Southwestern graduate, who grew up in Cisco. "Dr. Addy was never too busy for anybody. He was always making house calls or making special allowances for people who couldn't afford to pay him.

"Dr. Addy never charged pastors for his services because he knew they lived on low incomes while caring for the people of the town," says Golemon. "And to this day, I do the same thing in my practice."

Golemon, who now has a family practice in the small Panhandle town of Lockhart, grew up under Addy's care. "I had asthma, and in the 1950s there was little treatment except for Benadryl and TLC--both of which Dr. Addy had in ample supply.

"I always wanted to be a doctor like him," says Golemon. "I was interested in everything he did, and he always seemed interested in me. In fact, he was the one who influenced my decision to go to Southwestern. I remember one Saturday when he spent the whole morning telling me about the different medical schools and why Southwestern was the best choice."

Golemon is not the only Cisco boy to follow in Addy's SWMS tradition. Drs. Tom Lee and Robert Cluck are both Southwestern alumni who have their own practices in Oakland, Calif., and Arlington, Texas, respectively.

"They're all good boys," says Addy. "I tell them that there are always going to be sick folks who need to be taken care of -- that there will always be a need for caring people."

Addy says he is alarmed by the accelerating trend among today's young doctors to specialize. "Our generation of general practitioners is a vanishing breed," he says. "I think a country doctor should be able to do anything that comes along in order to take care of his patients."

Addy is certified by the American Board of Family Practice and the Texas Academy of Family Practice. He is constantly aware of advances in medicine, evidenced by his own personal library. Because there is no sizable library in the area, Addy has subscribed to several leading medical journals for years. His bound volumes fill three rooms and are always there should he need "brushing up" in a particular area.

Cisco wouldn't be the same without Dr. Ervin Addy. And even though he's retiring, he'll still be around to help take care of people. In addition to yard work and grandchildren, he plans to spend some of his time filling in for the other doctors in town when they're away on vacation--all two of them.

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