

Dr. Harry Rosen: Sculpting a Legacy at McGill

We all need positive role models in our lives. Yet we can never be sure how we will meet these people or what their influence will be. Dr. Harry Rosen of Montreal feels fortunate to have met many of his personal mentors through his lifelong involvement in clinical teaching.

The 1953 graduate of McGill University was first encouraged to pursue teaching by the late Drs. Prescott Mowry and Donald C. Gordon, then dean of dentistry and head of the department of operative dentistry respectively, at McGill. This initial foray into the vocation led to a teaching career that has spanned more than 50 years, primarily instructing students in restorative dentistry and prosthodontics within McGill's undergraduate faculty of dentistry and at the McGill University Health Centre multidisciplinary residency program at the Montreal General Hospital.

Throughout his tenure, Dr. Rosen has taken on the role of mentor for subsequent generations of dentists and prosthodontists who are now spread throughout the globe. "I learned that being a good teacher also requires being an inspirational model," he says. "If you

can help motivate people to achieve their full potential, it's amazing the directions people choose and the heights they can achieve."

New Clinical Teaching Fund

An active professor emeritus at McGill whose teaching has taken him around the world, Dr. Rosen is now hoping to inspire his contemporaries by championing a creative way to help support young clinical teachers at his alma mater. He has teamed up with the McGill faculty of dentistry to spur the development of the Dr. Harry Rosen Endowed Clinical Teaching Fund, which will provide financial support to young clinical teachers for activities such as ongoing training and attending conferences. As an endowment fund, the annual income generated will be available in perpetuity to assist these clinical teachers. "I see this fund as a way to say thank you to young teachers and to offer them something that hasn't been offered before," notes Dr. Rosen.

Two scholarships awarding excellence for McGill dental students currently exist in Dr. Rosen's name, funded in perpetuity by one generous family of patients. Dr. Rosen wants to create a similar type of award that would see young dental teachers at McGill rewarded for excellence. The university is enthusiastic about the unique fund: "The faculty's young, dynamic team of teachers will immediately realize the benefits and will be able to extend these benefits to future students who will pass through the gates of McGill," says Debbie Larocque, director of development for the McGill faculty of dentistry.

The Importance of Role Models

Dr. Rosen has always believed in contributing to his profession by sharing his knowledge through publications and presentations on topics ranging from gold foil and precision operative dentistry in the '50s, to restoration of endodontically treated teeth in the '60s, to perio-prosthodontics in the '70s, to treatment of root caries in the '80s, through to predictable implant prosthodontics in the '90s and beyond. He attributes the evolution of his original contributions to the mentors and role models who exerted a profound influence on him as he matured as a dentist and educator.



Dr. Harry Rosen with patient and resident at the Montreal General Hospital Dental Clinic.
Photo credit: Owen Egan

Most of Dr. Rosen's early mentors were great technicians and very skilled with their hands. "I had a lot of respect for their precision and innovation and I tried to emulate this," he recalls. However, as his experience within the field of restorative dentistry grew, his perspective also expanded. "I began to adopt more of a multidisciplinary approach, examining the complete masticatory system," he notes. "This eventually led to a realization that what functioned well, in most instances, also looked good." Such harmony between esthetics and function would become a fundamental philosophy of Dr. Rosen's life — both in his dentistry and in his leisure.

Passion for Dentistry and Art

The father of 3 and grandfather of 8 continues to enjoy a diverse range of active pleasure pursuits, from horse jumping to windsurfing to Bulgarian folk dancing, to name but a few.

Yet the landscape surrounding Dr. Rosen's country home in the Laurentians proves to be the richest source of pleasure for the septuagenarian. What began as a project of necessity to shift rocks at his rural retreat north of Montreal has evolved into a medium to express his artistic vision through stone sculpture.

"My interest in art ultimately derives from dentistry, which is both an art and a science," he explains. "In dentistry, first you deal with the task at hand by solving your patient's problem. Yet it takes a certain amount of creativity and restructuring, working with the elements that you are presented with, and in many instances, seemingly creating something out of nothing."

"Likewise, when moving stones to clear an area of my lake I realized that each stone had its own beauty," continues Dr. Rosen. "I would expose these stones and find that each had a beautiful size, shape, colour or texture, and when I put these stones together it created a composition that was even more beautiful than the stones themselves."

Among his creations, he has been inspired to produce 2 monumental gravity-held structures that grace the property surrounding his cottage. A 9-foot tall, Inuksuk-inspired stone sculpture symbolizing Man led to its 12-foot female companion titled *Universal Woman on a Half Shell*, based on Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. To complete this unique family, Dr. Rosen is currently working on *Little Hercules*, a child-like figure who is lifting a barbell, emulating his elders by demonstrating his strength.

In modern day vernacular, 'earth art' best describes Dr. Rosen's physically demanding challenge to transform the landscape. He has honed his artistic talents to the point that others have begun to take notice. Most notably, a PBS television crew from Mountain Lake, New York, featured Dr. Rosen on its *Art Express* program in November 2004.

After realizing that this 10-minute profile merely scratched the surface in trying to capture the complex interests, influence and essence of Dr. Rosen, a 28-minute feature documentary titled



Dr. Rosen using scaffold, levers and pulleys to hoist the head of one of his sculptures into place.



Universal Woman on a Half Shell, based on Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, balances on a 4-tonne rock base.



Dr. Rosen pictured at his dental practice in Montreal.

Dr. Harry Rosen – A Renaissance Man will be aired on Mountain Lake PBS on November 1, 2006. There will be an advance screening of the new documentary on October 19, 2006, at Moyse Hall on McGill campus.

Encouragement for Graduates

What do Dr. Rosen's artistic endeavours have to do with the future of clinical teaching in Canadian dental faculties? Dr. Rosen not only moves rocks and stone for his art but he plans to move some of the barriers that currently exist for young teachers entering the profession.

"Graduates trying to start a practice today are faced with the overwhelming expense involved with setting up an office," he says. "The dental profession is also becoming increasingly influenced

by the forces of commercialism and the pressures are immense on young dentists." With this in mind, Dr. Rosen feels that the time is right to examine current recruitment methods and perhaps consider providing more incentives to encourage young graduates to enter into teaching.

"Young dentists need soulmates and being involved in teaching can help," he says. "It gives you an opportunity to meet senior people in the profession who can offer guidance or provide positive examples to emulate in dentistry." Speaking with the wisdom of experience, the 77-year-old Dr. Rosen continues to emulate senior people in the profession who influence his own life.

Dr. Rosen has received numerous professional accolades during his career, but he singles out the Award of Excellence from the American Academy of Operative Dentistry as his most cherished. While he acknowledges that the recognition and respect of his peers is satisfying, Dr. Rosen cites his time spent with his associates, patients and students as providing the greatest satisfaction. "Life is all about relationships with people and being open to learning from every contact with every person you meet," he feels. "Through my time in dentistry and teaching I am fortunate to have been able to touch some people's lives in a positive way."

The Dr. Harry Rosen Endowed Clinical Teaching Fund at McGill will ensure that he continues to touch people's lives in a positive way for years to come. ❖

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www.drharryrosen.com