

2001 Special Merit Award: Robert J. Collins, DMD, MPH

Presented by Dushanka V. Kleinman, DDS, MScD

This year we are fortunate to have two recipients of the AAPHD Special Merit Award: Dr. Robert J. Collins and Dr. Caswell A. Evans. This award is presented to individuals for their special meritorious service to public health dentistry and for their tireless efforts on behalf of the nation's health and AAPHD's goals. Let me begin in alphabetical order.

Dr. Robert J. "Skip" Collins

Dr. Robert J. Collins is being recognized for his dedication and commitment to the American Association of Public Health Dentistry and the specialty of dental public health by leading us through the second submission of the AAPHD application for the ADA's "specialty review." Dr. Collins has continually given of his time, expertise, and creativity to the association and to the specialty. He currently is a director for the American Board of Dental Public Health. In this capacity, and as a past-president of AAPHD, Dr. Collins willingly accepted and effectively directed the development of this second review document. His acceptance of this "assignment" on behalf of the association and the profession is but one example of many of his devotion to dental public health. For this and many of Dr. Collins' other contributions we are grateful, for he always adds both a professional and personal touch to everything he does.

Robert J. Collins was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, while his father was in the Navy and thus emerged his nickname—dad was big skipper, Robert was little skipper. Skip grew up in New Hampshire and received his undergraduate degree (major in biology, magna cum laude) from Saint Anselm's College, a college with an extremely special meaning for his family. Skip's father, a 1947 St. Anselm graduate, taught English there and eventually—after serving in the US Navy in World War II and spending time working in radio-TV—returned to the college holding senior management positions, ending with the posi-

tion executive vice-president. All three of Skip's siblings—a sister (first grade teacher) and two brothers (an emergency room physician, and a director of government relations in a law firm)—went to St. Anselm's, as well. To complete the story, St. Anselm's also is where Skip met his wife, Joan. With an interest in the health professions, and encouraged by high school testing and a family friend who was a dentist, Skip went on to receive his DMD degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine. It is no surprise that Joan also is in the health professions. She is a registered nurse, currently employed by a pediatric ophthalmologist.

In college Skip developed an interest in American Indians, and while at the University of Pennsylvania he discovered and applied for an internship with the IHS in New Mexico. Skip was commissioned in the PHS Commissioned Corps immediately after graduation, launching a career that had him and his family traveling throughout the country and around the world. In less than 10 years, Skip and Joan moved six times, with daughter Sarah born in North Dakota and son Patrick born in California. Sarah now is a kindergarten teacher, taking after her paternal grandmother and aunt (both of whom were/are first grade teachers). Patrick is an assistant

editor for the *CarolinaBlue* sports newspaper in Greensboro, NC, a position he took after completing college at Elon College this past year.

In the early part of his 24-year PHS career, Skip's responsibilities and training expanded, and if you thought you saw someone who looks like Skip during this time, you probably did. He had a rotating internship at the Gallup Indian Medical Center, and was the chief of the Service Unit Dental Program in Belcourt, North Dakota, and subsequently in Browning, Montana. In Arizona, Skip completed a dental education IHS residency, followed by what Skip called a "truly fascinating assignment." As chief of Program Area Dental Services in Sacramento, CA, he provided technical assistance to over 30 Indian-operated programs in that state. It should come as no surprise to any of us that Skip captured the attention of IHS headquarters and was recruited to the position of assistant chief, Dental Services Branch. Skip then received an MPH from Johns Hopkins University and completed a dental public health residency. Returning to IHS headquarters, he rapidly escalated to deputy chief and then chief of the Dental Services Branch. Shortly thereafter, Skip was appointed as the chief dental officer of the US PHS (Rear Admiral Upper Half), a position he concurrently held until his retirement in 1995.

What ingredients go into making a Skip Collins? Everyone who knows Skip knows of his dedication to the profession, his aim for perfection, his many achievements, and his kindness. He says that his parents always encouraged "educational performance." He attributes his career path to many individuals who inspired him and provided him with guidance. He has listed many, many individuals who have mentored and supported him. Primary among these are his parents, Robert and Dorothy Collins, who clearly provided him with love, support, and encouragement; Joan, his wife and best friend, who fully part-



Dr. Kleinman and Dr. Collins.

nered with him on all of life, work, and family; Robert Mecklenburg, who was his most critical supporter and who challenged him and set high standards for his career; and Dennis Leverett, who taught him, among other lessons, how to live gracefully and effectively in the shadow of death. Of course, I must add that he did mention the Fluoride Five for making preparation for and taking the boards memorable.

His interest in public health was sparked when he experienced the University of Pennsylvania's Special Patient's Clinic. After three years in the IHS he began to see how one person, armed with the right tools, could make a difference.

I asked Skip—as I did the other awardees—how he finds time to do all that he does, especially since he does say yes often (something we really appreciate). He also does so many activities thoroughly and with gusto. His response was, "I'd like to be able to say that I have a laser-quick mind, process information like a Pentium computer, need little sleep, and/or have discovered a way to create time." Don't we all wish for the same? He was quick to add, "The truth is that there are only so many hours in the day and I use them for work." But he does find time for his favorite pastimes. Skip is an avid golfer, as noted by his email address "skip2golf@aol.com," who enjoys reading and gardening. He says

he would not do anything differently if he had his professional life to do over. He did say that he might try to relax and enjoy the journey a bit more.

As you all know, Skip is well into his second career, one in which he serves as the deputy executive director for the IADR/AADR. Skip has been recognized by his alma maters, his professional organizations, and extensively by the US Public Health Service—which includes the Surgeon General's Exemplary Service Award and Medallion. Skip, thank you again for your commitment to dental public health, the specialty in this case. It is our honor to present you with the 2001 AAPHD Special Merit Award.

Remarks on Receiving the 2001 Special Merit Award

Robert J. Collins, DMD, MPH

Thank you, Dushanka.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Well done is better than well said." So, I'll try to be succinct today—especially since there are two Special Merit Awards to be awarded today.

I am very honored to be among today's distinguished list of recipients. As AAPHD past president, I had the pleasure of giving the Special Merit Award to Marsha Cunningham (1998). In 1990, I accepted this award on Dan Whiteside's behalf. So maybe the third time is a charm—and I must say that it is a great pleasure to accept this Special Merit Award on behalf of myself.

Jack Benny once said on receiving a prestigious award, "I really don't deserve this, but then I have arthritis and I don't deserve that either!" The difference of course is that one wouldn't voluntarily accept arthritis, but certainly would accept an award like this.

My thanks to Dushanka, Rebecca, and the Executive Council for this award. I consider it very special because, of all the organizations to which I belong, AAPHD is the one in which I have felt most at home—an affair

which has now lasted for over a quarter century.

At last year's meeting, I was just finishing my first year on the American Board of DPH—as director-elect—and thinking about how best to tackle my upcoming year as a full-fledged director. So, when Dushanka asked me to take on coordination of the report to the ADA on the Specialty of Dental Public Health, every bone in my body told me to say no. But of course, as we all understand, few of us have figured out how to say no to Dushanka, so instead of quickly saying no, I found myself saying yes. If my wife, Joan, had been on that trip with me, it might have been different, but she was not. Developing the report made for a hectic summer of 2000; nonetheless, with the help of many authors of the various sections and the guidance of the fine report done by Dave Striffler in the 1980s, it proved to be a doable task. The aid of my administrative assistant at IADR, Evonne Jackson, was also invaluable in helping me keep track of the various pieces during the process.

In the end, perhaps Ralph Waldo

Emerson had it right when he said: "The reward of a thing well done is having done it." So, thanks for the opportunity, Dushanka—but I am going to keep trying to figure out how to say no.

Dushanka mentioned my wife, Joan. I'd be remiss if I didn't also personally acknowledge that, without the support and tolerance of my spouse and best friend, the wonderful career I have had to date would not have been possible.

Dushanka also noted a few of my key mentors over the years. If time permitted today, I could add to her remarks about each and add many more—just as could all of you. A good starting place for me is the list of previous AAPHD award recipients listed on pages 12–13 of your program. Just a few additional mentors would include: my family dentist, Charlie Bourque; Jack McNeil, a fellow alumnus of St. Anselm College, who encouraged me to attend the University of Pennsylvania; and Rulon Dempster, who introduced me to the Special Patients Clinic at Penn and helped me find my way into the Public Health