

Distinguished Alumni

Former American Dental Association president named DA

By Marty C. Padilla
Alumnews Editor

“My university” is the way Dr. Joseph A. Devine, 1988 Distinguished Alumnus, refers to his alma mater.

The Cheyenne dentist and immediate past president of the American Dental Association says that Wyoming has always been the place he wanted to call home. He was born and raised in Cheyenne where his father, Dr. John A. Devine, was also a dentist. Joe says, “My father was a great believer in ethics and I'm sure this is what was the driving force behind my dedication to the profession I had chosen.”

His contributions to his profession represent but one side of Joe Devine. There is Joe Devine the family man with six children, Joe Devine the religious man, and Joe Devine the community leader and activist.



Devine has dealt with various issues of the day ranging from public education while serving on the Cheyenne School Board three terms, two as chairman, to making sure everyone in Cheyenne has enough fresh water to drink. Devine is credited with spearheading the passage of a controversial \$65 million referendum which would allow for the expansion of the Cheyenne water system. Devine was asked to head the project up after the referendum suffered a crushing defeat just six months earlier by Cheyenne voters. All of these endeavors fell outside of his love for his profession, which he clearly has distinguished himself within.

Devine has been described as a man with great good humor and an extraordinary degree of rich pure common sense. He is a man that cares about the issues and is not afraid to get involved with society. His all-time favorite hero is Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, whose portrait he proudly displays on his desk.

A fellow colleague who sent a letter of support for Devine's nomination described him this way, “There are many variations



of the story of a boy with a very humble upbringing and from a small town, making good against all odds. Very rarely have we seen a dentist elected as the president of the American Dental Association who came from a small city and never from that state in the west that is better known for its 'high altitude and low multitude.' However, when that dentist has the qualities of leadership, dedication, motivation and perseverance that Joe Devine has, such a once-in-a-lifetime accomplishment then becomes not only possible, but a reality.”

“I like my university because I think Wyoming is 'quietly efficient,’” Devine says. Six children have followed in dad's footsteps at UW, with five receiving degrees, two of them last spring, one of whom received his second degree in engineering.

“A lot of people are more impressed with prestige over quality,” says Devine. “I think the university offers both, but more importantly, good students are given the chance to do even better.”

Faculty retention is a real concern for Devine. He said that the faculty need to be “selectively rewarded and retained.” First-rate college professors and administrators are earning high salaries around the country with an increased competition to attract them.

“I would also like to see my university diversify the way they prepare students for their chosen field.” At one point during his career Devine worked intensively with the Wyoming Legislature to secure funds so that Wyoming students who were interested in entering the field of dentistry could attend neighboring institutions. Devine was victorious in his efforts and garnered funding from the state to send eight Wyoming students a year to Creighton's Boyne School of Dental Science and the University of Nebraska's College of Dentistry through a cooperative agreement. Efforts such as this have given many stu-

dents the opportunity to pursue their dreams, thanks to a man called Devine.

Thus began the crusade to recruit UW students and young people everywhere into the field of dentistry. Devine also found himself charged with the desire to improve the organization of dentists in Wyoming and throughout the nation. He served as President of the Wyoming Dental Association which named him Dentist of the Year in 1975, an honor which had only once before been presented in the Association's history. He served as the Southwest District Dental Society Representative for the American Dental Association nationally representing Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, Hawaii, Nevada, and New Mexico for 14 years as a delegate, second vice president and eventually president in 1986-87 of the 140,000 member organization. The offices of second vice president and president are the highest offices ever held by a Wyoming dentist in the ADA's history.

As ADA president, Devine spent the majority of time extensively traveling around the globe as the ADA's ambassador, tackling tough issues surrounding the practice of dentistry. However, he noted, most people offered constructive criticisms or suggestions.

When Devine entered the American Dental Association, he frankly states, Wyoming had little or no recognition within the national organization. Following many years of getting involved with the political machinery of the ADA, through work on its Task Force on Peer Review, its Special Committee on Dental Hygiene and its public education programs, Devine proudly says, “They (the ADA) really recognize the fact that there is a Wyoming.”

The term as ADA president allowed Devine to experience a new side of his career. He was afforded the opportunity to confront national issues with political leaders that could make a differ-

ence. He recalled one afternoon that he had lunch with C. Everett Koop, United States Surgeon General, whom he described as fascinating.

Devine's motto throughout his career has been. “If you want to be treated like a doctor you have to behave like a doctor; have compassion and interest. You go to a lot of medical offices today and you feel like your just a number on a computer.” During a speech Devine delivered to the Pennsylvania Dental Association he was quoted as saying, “Teeth are fastened to people; and until you understand and empathize with people you will not be a successful dentist, even though you may be a skilled clinician.”

Devine says that his term as ADA president did not give him much time to enjoy pastimes of fishing, snowmobiling, playing pocket billiards and getting together at least once a year with the entire Devine family. “But all that has changed,” he said with a smile.

Being a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity and the Alpha Epsilon Delta honorary medical fraternity were highlights of his UW experience. Devine studied a pre-medical program designed to enter dental school. His days at the university were interrupted by World War II, returning in the post war days when the UW campus began to boom with GI's home from the war and ready for a college career. He later attended Creighton University and graduated with a DDS in 1952. It was in 1985 that Creighton named him “Dentist of the Year” and invited one of it's most prominent graduates back.



In December, 1952, he married Mary Margaret Lynch, and the couple have six children, Patrick J., 34, BA '78; Joseph A.M., 33, BS '84 and BS '88; Martha Ann, 32, BS '78; Paul C., 28, BS '82; James Vincent, 26, BS '88; and T. Luke 24, EX '88.

For the future Devine said he sees education at all levels beginning to live within its financial means, “something we really have not seen since World War II,” he says. “We have to be cost effective and competitive, our futures depend upon it.”