

Dr. John Doering's Tribute: Dr. Mike Leary's 2008 Dental Educator of the Year Award

Tonight, I have the distinct honor of presenting Dr. Mike Leary to this University of Iowa alumni audience in honor of his "2008 Dental Educator of the Year" recognition. While Dr. Leary passed away last month after a three-year battle with leukemia, I still feel Mike's presence through our Department of Family Dentistry's policies and procedures, and I'm sure it will continue for the future. Jim Harris gave a tremendous tribute at Mike's funeral, so there is no way I can attempt to capture its essence. His entire text/tribute can be found on our Family Dentistry Web page. Please take a few moments to read Jim's memories of Mike Leary's life.

Since I can't match Jim Harris' tribute, I then retreated to Mike's many colleagues to share a quote, a sentence, a couple of words, or a glimpse of how they remember Mike Leary.

However, Penni Ryan limited my comments to 3-4 minutes – and we all know that you do exactly what Penni tells you to do – so here it goes:

The most successful and prominent individuals that Mike mentored are Jim Harris and Heather Heddens.

Heather Heddens is our current president of the IDA; and Heather says, "I would always ask Mike, "Can I do this or I can't do this" and his response was always, "Yes, you can!" And now I am doing this presidency of the IDA. Mike always had more confidence in me than I usually have in myself."

Jim Harris, past president of the IDA, says: "You never had an encounter with Dr. Leary that left you feeling neutral. You loved him or hated him. But if you really thought about what he said or did to you, it was always in your's and the patient's best interest."

A potpourri of comments now follow in no particular order:
Bill Johnson, department head in Endodontics, is more philosophical: "Marion Robert Morrison was born in Winterset, Iowa. James Mike Leary was born in Keota, Iowa. Marion Robert Morrison moved to Hollywood and changed his name to John Wayne and became famous playing individuals who were brave and courageous leaders. People who were trustworthy, honest, loyal, and ethical. John Wayne became famous playing Mike Leary."

Emeritus faculty, Jerry Walker said, “Mike kept us loose when we were in the National Guard.”

From the Orthodontics Department, Dr. Bishara’s comments are: “A man who loved life, his family and his profession”.

Connie Norton, past Family Dentistry secretary, recalls: “Just the two of us were in the elevator. Before the door opened, Dr. Leary ruffed up his hair, glasses crooked on his face, top shirt buttons open, tie pulled over, staggered off the elevator on third floor, in front of faculty and students, leaving me standing, shocked and dismayed.”

Howard Field, emeritus faculty, recalls: “When I first met Mike, he scared the hell out of me. Later, I realized I could give it right back to him and we both enjoyed it.”

Perio grad student, Bryan Recker quotes: “Never settle for less, than the best, under the given circumstances”.

Nancy Slach, Perio dental hygienist, writes: “I vividly remember him cradling his new grandson in one arm and parading him around the dental school – I don’t think I’ve seen him much happier.”

A private practice (periodontics) in Davenport, Iowa, Mike Franzman, UI DDS, has a direct quote: “I’ll always remember the story of Dr. Leary telling a patient, “I keep my “derrière” cleaner than you keep your mouth. Start brushing your teeth.”

Patrick Lloyd, former Family Dentistry faculty here, and now dean in Minnesota, writes: “The world would be a better place if there were more Mike Learys. He was always there to listen, no matter how busy he was. He cared about everyone, no matter how little he knew them. He made you laugh, no matter how difficult it was. He kept you focused, no matter how much you wanted to stray. He held onto to what was right, no matter how many challenged him. And, he stayed true to his word, no matter what the cost.”

Peter Pauly, an adjunct faculty and a private practitioner says: “I will always remember Mike at our last Family Dentistry faculty conference. He was there, hairless, weakened by chemotherapy, fighting cancer that would soon take his life, yet making suggestions on how to

improve our students' education. His dedication was immeasurable. He was my friend, my teacher, and my role model.”

Joel Sardzinski, CID, DDS, writes: “He was a great American and I could not be more proud to have known him.”

Matthew T. Pyfferoen, DDS, shared : “He truly was a role model for all in the profession of dentistry and an excellent representation of the outstanding faculty at the College of Dentistry. It was this interaction that solidified my decision to pursue dental school as my new career.”

A former Family Dentistry faculty and Dean of Clinical Activities, Dan Hall, an avid fishing companion of Mike's but now happily retired in Arizona says: “Mike was of course way ahead of the politicians “with the perfume on a pig saying.” As for Educator of the Year, again, this is well deserved – no one cared more about the students and worked harder at being a good teacher than Mike. Mike cared deeply about the department and his fellow faculty. He treated everyone he came in contact with respect. If I had to sum it up, the most important thing about Mike was he didn't do things to make Mike look good, he did things because they were the right things to do.”

A written tribute to Mike Leary is in the brochure on your dining table.

Mike Leary's mother was a teacher and his father was a DDS, so naturally Mike became both. As a professor in Family Dentistry, his presence continues to be felt, and he is continuing to teach with the many new dental graduates he mentored. Mike Leary's family is with us tonight – his soul-mate and wife, Karolyn; his daughter, Kecia, Class of 2004, a pediatric DDS with a masters degree in dental public health; and his son, JP, who of all things is an attorney/lawyer in the Jag Corp of the United States Army. Would you all please come forward to receive your husband's and your father's recognition as 2008 Dental Educator of the Year.