

# Igniting the Spirit of Teamwork

*Following is the text of Dr. Webb's incoming president's speech to the 2004 House of Delegates, given Nov. 21.*

**F**our years ago, I stood in front of the Board of Trustees and asked for this job. And four years ago, as I stood at the back of this podium, this day seemed so far away. And now here it is!

At that time, I had finished my fifth year as trustee from the Tri-County Dental Society, a position I had taken without any intention or desire to seek a position on the Executive Committee. But after five years, I felt that CDA lacked direction and that our profession was guiding us instead of the other way around. I had two options at the time: Sit down and keep my mouth shut, or run for the open position of secretary of CDA and try to change our course.

As many of you know, the first option is not in my being and so here I am. Thank you again for this opportunity to serve.

The start was a bit rough, but over the last two years the journey has turned fun. Actually, back then, in my presentation to the trustees, I expressed my fear that this organization would not leave the dock and set sail toward a new CDA. I had a vision of what we could eventually be: a new CDA that gives all those involved in this wonderful profession of ours a seat at the table and a part in shaping our future; a CDA that controls our own future and manages the oral health of our communities.

At that time, we were not representative of our profession, our membership, or the population in this state. We needed to come together as one voice and one force to tell the world how we will treat our patients. My vision began forming with help from the Diversity Steering Committee meetings in 1996. We met as a group of very different people but with a common

interest, dentistry. We eventually gelled as a force to be reckoned with in the future. What was once "My thing" now has become ingrained in CDA's thinking.

I can tell you that, if this organization, and all of you who volunteer to make a difference, benefit from these efforts as much as I have personally, your lives are much richer. I must thank each of you here who were a part of those early efforts. And to those organizations that up to that time were not included in CDA, I thank you for your patience. I think those meetings seven and eight years ago were the start of the new CDA.

As you look around this room, I think you will agree we have certainly become more inclusive now than ever before. We still have some work to do and we need to continue to open our arms and to be comfortable with the tremendous diversity we have in this profession. It is through this diversity that unity will be achieved.

A couple of months ago, I experienced my quad-annual renewal of my involvement with the Olympic Games when the athletes of the world came together in Athens. With a few notable exceptions, the Olympic Games have been a venue where athletes come together to promote international understanding among the youth of the world through sport and culture. For that fortnight every two years now, the competitors are not concerned with our differences, but with our common ground of athletic competition. We celebrate that which we have in common. Whether we finish first or last, the experience of just being together is exhilarating.

I have always thought at CDA we can do the same thing. We can come together for the common interest of dentistry. It doesn't matter what we look like, where we come from, what language we speak, what religion



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we practice, what age or gender we are, or what our practice setting happens to be. We all share the common interest of the welfare of our patients and the oral health of the public.

I competed in both swimming and water polo. In swimming, an individual sport, I set my own agenda and reached for my own goals. It was me against everyone else. In water polo, the team is everything. We each had our role or position and we each had to perform so the team could win. There was no room for personal agendas. Each goal that was scored was by the team and each shot our goalie blocked was a team effort. And as a result, we all stood on the awards podium and celebrated our victories.

Organized dentistry should be a team effort. Leadership is a team effort. We as your leadership team are as good right now as any I have worked with. The Executive Committee and the senior staff are working extremely well as a team. ExCom and the Board of Trustees are working well, senior staff and all staff members are working well as a team. There are so many issues facing us right now, it is virtually impossible for any one of us to have thorough knowledge of all of them. But working as a team, we are able to deal with anything that comes along.

I will never forget walking into late Jim Pride's office in Larkspur and reading the sign sitting on his desk. "You may be smarter than me, but you're not smarter than my whole team." I can say the same thing about your leadership team now.

Our team effort needs to include every aspect of the tripartite — components, CDA and ADA. For too long now, we have been competitors with many personal agendas. With Goal 9 of our strategic plan, we are attempting to explore how CDA and the components can work better as a team. While membership recruitment and retention is best done at the component level, I think we at CDA can help get that job done better so that all our members enjoy the same level of service. And yet there is still an element of personal agendas and compe-

tion preventing us from reaching the awards podium. I ask you now, as players in organized dentistry, to come together. Let's play as a team with the spirit of cooperation so that we can become the best. We all have our talents and if we bring them together with team work there will be no boundaries on what we can accomplish.

I have been asked what my agenda is for the year. That is an appropriate question to ask of the incoming president. I divide this question into two categories, internal and external.

Four years ago, I had in mind several things that needed to change in order for CDA to regain its pre-eminent status. The day I took office, I began to push for change. Many of the changes I envisioned have taken shape with the guidance of our strategic plan.

Volunteer leadership is actually leading instead of trying to manage. The Board of Trustees is actually engaged in strategic planning and discussions instead of reviewing and ratifying. Information is being shared instead of being kept secret. With the oversight of Debra Finney, we have highlighted this last year with uniting our community.

Streamlining our governance has brought the family closer together so we can better serve our members. Combining our policy councils into one policy council will mean that all facets of an issue can actually be discussed at one time. The two final pieces of the puzzle are the leadership development program and Goal 9 of our strategic plan.

Most of the issues brought forward by Dadie Perlov are related to the preparedness of our leadership at all levels. The proper development of our leaders at both component and CDA levels will alleviate many of the comments in Dadie's report. The Goal 9 task force needs to complete a thorough look at the components, CDA, and ADA to give us a better idea of where the various programs should be to make us more efficient as a team. We should never stop evaluating our performance and effectiveness.

The Leadership Development Committee will open up the path to

leadership. Up until now, this process has been a closed one in which we perpetuated ourselves. To quote Justice Sandra Day O'Connor "In order to cultivate a set of leaders with legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, it is necessary that the path to leadership be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity." I believe we will do this with our new screening and leadership development.

My agenda for this year for the internal aspects is to bring all of these changes together and to complete the new CDA. We must never, however, stop looking at how we do things. Times are changing very rapidly these days, and the minute we stop evaluating ourselves, we will become nonrelevant and obsolete.

There are many external issues facing us today: Access to care, licensure reform, availability of trained auxiliaries, third-party intervention, international accreditation and many more.

Of all the issues facing dentistry today, access to care has come to the forefront and it seems to encompass many of the issues. We live in a country and a state that continues to enjoy better oral health than ever. Thanks to our dental education system and to technological innovation, we are able to offer more treatment options to more people. Yet, we still have children who are unable to get care for a simple toothache. For some it is a financial problem, for others it is the inability to get to any of the clinics or the dental schools that offer free or discounted treatment. You don't have to go very far from here to find these people. Most of the access problems near here are those families who don't qualify for Denti-Cal or healthy family programs but don't make enough money to make dental care a reality until it becomes acute.

Up to this point, we, in the dental profession, have enjoyed relative freedom in how we practice and who we treat. We have been given this freedom with the understanding that we will "take care of the dental needs of our population." Now, as our population

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grows larger and more diverse, we have community leaders who are beginning to ask why we have so many dental problems that go untreated. They are beginning to say that if we don't solve this problem, someone else will. Their solutions raise many questions as to the quality of care that will be rendered. As we look at these proposed solutions and continue to oppose them, we have been slow to offer solutions of our own. We are now at the point at which we can no longer continue to say no without a workable solution of our own. We need to be more involved in programs like the Robert Wood Johnson and California Endowment "pipeline grant" which pushes more community involvement for our dental students and the recruitment of more underrepresented minorities to dental school.

During the ADA meeting last month in Orlando, we discussed access to care. Many of the dentists there were recruited to volunteer in Alaska to help them with the shortage. This may help in the short term, but, in my opinion, is not a long-term cure. A program where we can train someone to be there on a permanent basis to establish a doctor-patient relationship and deal with the cultural issues will offer a long-term cure. Regardless, the solution will come with all the parties involved. This is a problem in which we need to be part of the solution.

It is my hope that this year we can tackle the access problem in this state with less talk and more action. We have been through a period when we struggled to keep our organization alive, and now as our internal issues are solved, we will have more time and energy to attack these external problems.

And so as we embark on a new year, I believe my duty is to urge you as leadership of this organization forward. We will honor the past and those who got us here, but I will not let you turn back. Will Rogers once said "Don't let yesterday take up too much of today." Your job is not to maintain the status quo. Your job is to move CDA to the future, to envision what will be, and to direct us there. And as you do that, remem-

ber, be true to your values and have fun. And as CDA moves forward, that will be my reward.

I am thankful you have given me the opportunity to be a part of the leadership of this great organization. At each of your seats is a pin with a torch on it. As the Olympic torch was lit in honor of

the king of the Greek gods, Zeus, to symbolize the Olympic ideal of international understanding, let this torch symbolize the new CDA of understanding and inclusiveness.

Thank you again as we look forward to this coming year. Now let's get to work. **CDA**