



## Dr. Jack F. Conley Retires From *CDA Journal*

PATTY REYES

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"My first conversation with the man lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes," recalled Jeanne Marie Tokunaga, who,

**T**he worst that has been said about Jack F. Conley, DDS, is that he really dislikes rabbits. Not the soft, furry, docile bunnies associated with springtime, but the longer-eared, longer-legged *Lepus sp.* with its razor-sharp incisors and turf-tearing Marquis de "Sod" tendencies.

Away from his beleaguered lawn, Conley has continually excelled in his career at the University of Southern California School of Dentistry, and notably as editor of the *Journal of the California Dental Association*.

This month, after nearly 22 years, 252 issues, and more than 225 editorials, Conley completes his distinguished tenure as *Journal* editor. Alan L. Felsenfeld, DDS, has been chosen as editor-select. His first issue will be published in December.

"Jack's longevity as editor, in my opinion, was to be the editor, not a political force," said J. David Gaynor, DDS. "He has, to a very great extent, stayed away from the political process and served to comment on issues of importance to CDA in his editorials."

Many people count themselves extremely fortunate to have worked with the gracious and genteel Conley, and were eager to share their stories.

as managing editor, started working with Conley in 1996.

"My predecessor warned me this would be the case. She said it would not indicate any condescension on his part; he wasn't going to be over explaining because I was new. That's the way he talks to everybody! For a while, I decided I could outtalk him," Tokunaga said. "I'm just the woman for the job, too. But after about a month of trying that, I was exhausted. I bow to the master!"

Dale Redig, DDS, former CDA executive director, knew Conley's father for many years before meeting the younger Conley. "I was conditioned to a degree, I suppose. I noticed that he was also quiet and unassuming, but had very clear ideas about how he would be handling the job of editor, as his father had been with the programs for which he was responsible as a USC faculty member."



**Author /** Patty Reyes is the editorial coordinator of the *Journal of the California Dental Association*.



*“He never places blame on staff, he never expresses disappointment, he never reprimands.”*

JEANNE MARIE TOKUNAGA

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Those who know Conley well agree that he prefers to linger over his super-sized portion of humble pie which he, of course, serves himself. (He has on occasion described himself as “bland and forgettable.”) They quickly dismiss Conley’s self-abasement, which at its essence amounts to Pabulum, and instead offered accurate descriptions such as careful, principled, patient and in possession of an understated sense of humor.

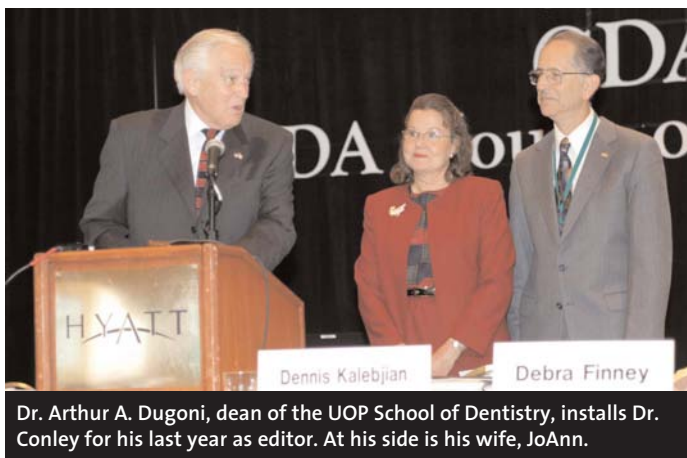
“He never places blame on staff, he never expresses disappointment, he never reprimands,” Tokunaga said. “He always assumes that staff gave their best effort. It really made you want to rise to the occasion for him and show him that his faith in you was not misplaced. A couple of times, I had to bring to him a problem that I had generated. Instead of taking me to task for the gaffe, he simply said, ‘Well, what we should do now is ...’ The mistake had been made, let’s not dwell on it, let’s just fix it. That was his unspoken attitude. That’s a great example to me and something I hope to keep in mind as I raise my children. He and his wife, JoAnn, don’t have any children, but I think he would have made a great dad.”

## KEYS TO LONGEVITY

Conley’s purposeful approach, coupled with his low-key style and open-mindedness, were hallmarks of his long tenure.

“Jack has a balanced analysis of issues facing the profession, used a writing style that was never self-promotional, and instilled that sense as a guiding principle for *CDA Journal* staff,” Redig said.

“He understood budgeting and adherence to budget. Publications were attractive as well as timely. Separating ‘news’ and the traditional ‘grin and grab it’ photos from our *Journal* was a major step forward. The ensuing separation satisfied the



Dr. Arthur A. Dugoni, dean of the UOP School of Dentistry, installs Dr. Conley for his last year as editor. At his side is his wife, JoAnn.

need to inform membership on a timely basis of events and political issues, while securing the status of a professional, refereed scientific journal. This may seem a small matter at this time — when he took steps to ensure that it would happen, it was not a small matter,” Redig said. “He knew that it would work and of course it did, setting a standard for other dental publications in other states.”

Longtime friend, Howard Landesman, DDS, School of Dentistry dean at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center and former dean of USC School of Dentistry, said Conley's most outstanding quality is his dedication and commitment to the profession. "His key to longevity as editor was that he is the very best at what he does."

Gaynor, Conley’s “kingmaker,” who encouraged Conley to follow the path into CDA leadership many years before he became *Journal* editor, was immediately struck by “Jack’s high personal integrity and commitment to any task he accepts or is assigned to.”

That consistency was evident in all aspects of Conley’s purview. “He always put the members and the integrity of the *Journal* first,” Tokunaga said. “That was always in the forefront of his mind, whether he was making decisions about the *Journal* or interacting with an individual member.”

His commitment to thoroughness in reaching a rational conclusion didn’t often break land speed records.

“He faces challenges slowly, very slowly looking at all avenues in the decision process. It has been rumored that if he had been in charge of the Apollo mission to the moon, the rocket would be ready to launch in 2005,” said Gaynor endearingly. “He does not understand the words ‘knee-jerk reaction.’”

## THE JOURNAL

Conley’s No. 1 goal was to publish original, thought-provoking, informational manuscripts, a task easier said than done. Additionally, he welcomed those with differing opinions to voice their views via letters to the editor.



Dr. Conley takes a moment from video duty at Catalina Island's Bird Park.



*“He planned ahead, then moved ahead, and stayed the course.”*

DALE REDIG, DDS

“Jack has really enjoyed working with the people of CDA,” said Conley’s wife, JoAnn. “It has been a good way to give back to a profession that’s been good to him, and he really has enjoyed the people.”

When it came to his editorial column, Jack Conley was resolute with his well-researched and insightful commentary.

“I never saw him jump to a conclusion,” Redig said. “He planned ahead, then moved ahead, and stayed the course.”

One editorial that stood out was when Conley wrote on the problems associated with using live patients for the Dental Board exam, particularly surrounding how candidates obtain a patient for the test, Tokunaga recalled.

“The *Journal* received five letters in response to that editorial, the most I have ever seen,” she said. “He was really riled on that particular issue, and it made for a strong editorial.”

His deft guidance of the *Journal* all these years resulted in numerous awards. Among the cream of the cream: International College of Dentists 2003 Platinum Publication, Western Publications Association 1999 Maggie Award, California Society of Association Executives 2002 and 2003 Award for Communication Excellence, and 2002 Prize for Dental Journalism.

“Jack followed a number of editors who were not as successful,” Gaynor said. “I believe he learned from them and then chartered his course, which was well within his thinking of what editors’ responsibilities are.”

### CONLEY’S CONTRIBUTIONS

As editor and a member of CDA’s Executive Committee, Conley brought “a voice of reason and calm through some tumultuous times during his tenure in the leadership cadre,” Redig said.

“Moreover, he has been a significant force in setting high standards for dental publications. His peers have recognized him for that in various ways, and he will be remembered for it.”

Landesman said Conley’s contributions to dentistry and CDA were his ability to express himself freely and without fear on a multitude of topics, many of which were highly controversial.”



Before Conley was appointed editor in April 1983, his predecessors averaged a term of two to three years of service.

“All in all, Jack brought stability to the post,” Gaynor said. “A fine mind, a fine talent to discern what is important to the profession and a unique ability to put it all into words for the profession. His length of service, in its own way, served as a stabilizing influence on the organization and its leadership. I am proud to count Jack Conley as a friend.”

### WHAT’S NEXT?

While Conley continues full time at USC, stepping away from the *Journal’s* editorship, CDA leadership with its related activities, and his part-time practice, offers him the luxury of more time.

“I keep telling him he needs to figure out what he wants to do when he grows up,” Conley’s wife, JoAnn, said with a laugh. “Jack loves to take video pictures. Whenever we go on a trip, he takes wonderful videos and adds nice things like music and titles, but I’ve rarely seen them. He’s about five to six years behind.”

Landesman recalled one globe-trotting excursion to Japan with the Conleys. “I enjoyed watching the expression on Jack’s face when we were treated to some rather exotic raw fish delicacies which of course we had to eat in order to show our respect.”

Video organizing and editing, and household to-do lists aside, the couple hope to increase their travel time after Conley downshifts to cruising speed. Some of that time likely will be spent trying solutions for the vexing rabbit issue.

“Jack likes music, museums, and yard work — when the rabbits aren’t there,” JoAnn Conley said.

“I would guess he’s spent \$500 and 500 hours in the backyard this year alone” she said. “I used to think they were cute, but I don’t anymore. They eat everything down so that nothing comes back. We’ve tried to get our dog Star to chase them, but the rabbits run and hide behind the fence and come back out again. This is the worst year, I’d say. They’ve been breeding ... and they’re very good at it. Now that Jack has some time, we’ll keep trying until we find something that works.”

Those Glendale-dwelling, grass-snacking rabbits should consider themselves on notice.



## Jack F. Conley the Man

Ever since his childhood, Jack F. Conley has held a fondness for Catalina Island, where his parents rented a home every summer. The breathtaking backdrop and pristine beaches made for perfect swimming experiences.

Conley became a competitive swimmer and later a lifeguard. Lifeguarding was lucrative enough to pay for sweetheart JoAnn Willyard's engagement ring. The couple was married in 1962.

Over the years, the Conleys have collected carousel horses made by well-known American carvers. The first one they purchased is a Parker horse named "Beauty," which was carved in Kansas in 1911. "Jack likes to work with wood," JoAnn Conley said. "He sat out on the patio for hours with his dental drill cleaning out all the crevices and restoring some of the carvings that had been rubbed off by the people sitting on them."

The Conleys have purchased three more: "Patriot," an Armitage-Herschell carved in 1899; "Charger," a Spillman; and the bejeweled "Fancy."

"When he first told me he wanted carousel horses, I said that if we're going to have these things in the house, they would have to have nice faces. Some of the carousel horses have angry faces," JoAnn Conley explained. "So of the ones we have, which are mounted on poles in the house, all of them

have pleasant faces."

"Jack hasn't had a great deal of time to work on them, but maybe he will now," she said.

Rounding out the Conley's happy home are black-and-white purebred shelties named Cassie, 11½ years-old, and Star, 18 months. The couple started with shelties back in the 1970s.

"The first dog we had was a collie named Muffet, because of her big white muff," JoAnn Conley said. "We bought her while living at Camp Pendleton. In 1969, we moved to Glendale. The big earthquake in the '70s really affected her. The vet said we'd either have to tranquilize her or get her a puppy. So we got her a sheltie that looked like a miniature collie, that was Heidi, to keep Muffet active. Heidi was a very playful puppy. Muffet's turnaround was amazing in only a couple weeks' time, and that's how we got started with shelties."



JoAnn and Dr. Conley at home with their beloved shelties.

*"Jack is remarkable in terms of his character and professionalism, and his dedication to the university, to the profession, and to each new generation of students."*

DEAN HAROLD SLAVKIN

## Jack F. Conley the Dentist

Jack F. Conley earned his DDS degree in 1964 at the University of Southern California School of Dentistry. Upon Conley's dental school graduation, his father presented him with a longhorn steer belt buckle that the elder Conley had cast.

From 1964 to 1966, Conley was on active duty in the Navy Dental Corps Reserve. He earned his master's degree in education in 1970, also at USC.

Since 1990, he has been associate professor, Departments of Restorative Dentistry and Dental Medicine and Public Health at USC. Conley, the Rex Ingraham Professor of Restorative Dentistry, recently retired from his part-time dental practice in Los Angeles.

Among his professional memberships are the American Association of Dental Schools, Pierre Fauchard Academy, International College of Dentists, and the American College of Dentists. His extensive service to dentistry includes: past regent and Southern California section chair of ACD; past

president of the Los Angeles Dental Society; former member of CDA Council on Dental Education; past CDA trustee; and ADA delegate.

A few of Conley's numerous administrative appointments at USC's School of Dentistry include assistant dean, Career Planning; assistant dean, Clinical Affairs; and directorships for Clinical Affairs, and Dental Auxiliary Utilization Programs. He presently is chair of the Ethics Committee.

Conley, who began his CDA career as a member of the association's Council on Dental Education in 1972, was honored at the 2000 Fall Session for his years of dedicated service.

In November 2001, the USC Dental Alumni Association named Conley Alumnus of the Year.

"Jack is remarkable in terms of his character and professionalism, and his dedication to the university, to the profession, and to each new generation of students," said Dean Harold Slavkin at the time of the award presentation.