

2012 Harkins Surgical Symposium: A Special Tribute to Dr. Carlos A. Pellegrini

The second session of the Harkins Symposium, held on October 12, 2012 was a tribute to Dr. Carlos A. Pellegrini on the occasion of his 20th anniversary as Chair of the Department of Surgery. A planning committee composed of the Chiefs of the Divisions, other faculty, and most importantly, Jennie Paxson, Dr. Pellegrini's Executive Assistant, arranged for this event which included surprise guests. Dr. Ron Maier, Professor and Jane and Donald D. Trunkey Chair in Trauma Surgery and Dr. Peter Wu, Associate Professor, General Surgery at the VA, were the hosts and primary coordinators of this event.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Maier noted that Dr. Pellegrini is completing his 20th year as Chair – a rare event for Chairs of Departments of Surgery – putting him in an elite group of not more than two or three individuals. These 20 years have been a period of growth – growth in numbers, growth of programs and growth of the Department's reputation. Dr. Pellegrini has overseen the “growth of a top tier surgery program.”

Ten invited guests – all close professional and personal colleagues of Dr. Pellegrini's from every era of his career – spoke about him, providing personal and professional recollections. They were each introduced by a member of the Department of Surgery faculty, who offered information about the relationship between Dr. Pellegrini and the guest.

Guest Speakers:

- Donald Trunkey, MD, Professor and Chair Emeritus, Department of Surgery, Oregon Health Sciences University (*introduced by Dr. Ron Maier*);
- Lawrence Way, MD, Emeritus Professor of Surgery, University of California, San Francisco (*introduced by Dr. Patch Dellinger*);
- Richard Karl, MD, Chairman Emeritus, Department of Surgery, University of South Florida, College of Medicine and Current Senior Member, Moffitt Cancer Center, Tampa, FL (*introduced by Dr. Jorge Reyes*);
- William Bremner, MD, Professor and The Robert G. Petersdorf Endowed Chair in Medicine, Department of Medicine, University of Washington (*introduced by Dr. Robert Sawin*);

- Thomas Russell, MD, Professor and Chair Emeritus, California Pacific Medical Center and Former Executive Director, American College of Surgeons (*introduced by Dr. David Byrd*);
- Richard Bell, Jr. MD, Professor Emeritus and Former Chair, Department of Surgery, Northwestern University, Feinberg School of Medicine and Former Assistant Executive Director, The American Board of Surgery (*introduced by Dr. Roger Tatum*);
- Marco Patti, MD, Professor, University of Chicago, Director, Center for Esophageal Diseases (*introduced by Dr. Alessandro Fichera*);
- Alberto Ferreres, MD, JD, MPH, FACS Professor of Surgery, University of Buenos Aires and Chair, Department of Surgery UBA Dr. Carlos Bocalandro Hospital, Argentina (*introduced by Dr. Brant Oelschlager*);
- Tom R. DeMeester, M.D., Professor and Chairman Emeritus, University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine, Department of Surgery (*introduced by Dr. Ron Maier*);
- Edward Verrier, MD, Professor, and former Division Chief, Cardiothoracic Surgery, University of Washington (*introduced by Dr. Ron Maier*).



Dr. Carlos A. Pellegrini receiving honor at surprise tribute.

Many of these individuals traveled hundreds and even thousands of miles to be at this event. Their respect and friendship were evident throughout as one after the other related what it has meant to be his colleagues and friends. Common themes emerged: steadfast friendship and loyalty; his love of family, food and dogs; his sense of humor; his inclination to ask forgiveness rather than permission; his commitment to the profession of surgery; his skill and commitment to his mentees; and his rare leadership abilities.

Putting the event together was complicated. Keeping it a surprise from Dr. Pellegrini was nearly miraculous. However, it was kept a surprise and became that much more meaningful. As Dr. Pellegrini said in an email following the event *“and the surprise....well – unbelievable....you all caught me ENTIRELY by surprise....I am now starting to think ‘if I am so easy to fool....what else is going on?’!!!”*

**Karen Horvath, MD, Professor,
Associate Chair for Education**

It has been a singular lifetime honor for me to work with this man. He lives out his concept of mentorship which is, “When you succeed, I succeed.” The astounding thing is that my story is not unique. Carlos Pellegrini lives out his concept of servant-leadership on a daily basis. I’ve seen him provide the same mentorship and personal attention to many others. He is tireless. He’s constantly mentoring others and gently pushing people up to the next level of success by looking for ways to promote them. Finally, Carlos Pellegrini has a unique gift for seeing the good in each person and shows that he appreciates them as an individual with unique contributions. Throughout the year he thanks people both publicly and privately for their achievements and contributions. Carlos Pellegrini personally cares about people. You can simply feel it.

In the area of integrity I’ve seen firsthand the way he lives out what he professes for over 16 years. Carlos Pellegrini is a wise counselor, a staunch advocate, a respected colleague, an amazing leader, a consensus builder, a visionary, and an exemplary mentor. Most importantly he has taught me about having the courage

to speak the truth and lead with integrity even when it’s difficult and even when it may come at a great personal cost to yourself. He is fearless in his integrity and demonstrates the great courage it takes to stand for truth, honor and professionalism unlike anyone I’ve ever known. In education terminology, Carlos Pellegrini’s life embodies the powerful principles of one of the most effective teaching tools available in a masterful way: The Hidden Curriculum. Wherever he goes and whatever he does he advances the people and the world around him to a new and higher plane in both personal and professional ways.”

**Leah Backhus, MD, Assistant Professor,
Cardiothoracic Surgery (VA)**

Dr. Pellegrini embodies the ideal characteristics of a mentor: he makes the effort to create a bond with his mentees and maintains an honest vested interest in their success. He has supported me personally as well as countless others. I have also seen his commitment to increasing diversity within the UW School of Medicine: from medical students to faculty. As an example, last year he approved establishing a scholarship fund for members of the department to travel to the Society of Black Academic Surgeons. This is part of the email I received from him approving the proposal: “I have carefully reviewed your proposal for scholarships for minority faculty/residents/students and I am happy to let you know that we believe it is (a) a great proposal and (b) a proposal we can fund.” His mentoring influence extends well beyond the walls of the UW School of Medicine and will live on well beyond his tenure here.

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OF MENTORSHIP WHICH IS,
“WHEN YOU SUCCEED, I SUCCEED.”**

– DR. KAREN HORVATH
