

One Miraculous Operation

Surgical Associates of Charleston, Part II

BY WILL CATHCART

Surgeons are not famous for the their modesty, yet like so many of the Lowcountry's finest, the members of Surgical Associates of Charleston are more than just surgeons. They are gentlemen, first, who happen to practice surgery and happen to be very good at doing so. Most of them are locals who come from a long line of doctors and surgeons.

In his living room on Tradd Street, Dr. Telfair Parker, now the senior partner of the practice, embodies this humility. He has just finished telling the history of the practice's founding fathers, as he calls them. Many of these men are Dr. Parker's contemporaries and many of the practice's next younger generation are surgeons whom Dr. Parker has recruited and helped train. Yet when it comes to the "Founding Fathers" still he leaves himself out, honoring those who came before him, and even those who worked

with him. Many of these men are no longer with us.

Dr. Parker and the next generation of the practice realize that not only medicine but people are also changing. Even in a place like Charleston, a handshake and a reputation don't mean what they once did. Yet it is no surprise that medicine is changing — that is the story of Surgical Associates. The success of so many surgical pioneers has completely transformed the practice of surgery in half of a century. For that technology and innovation, we also pay a price. Modern media is overwhelming and quality is often swallowed by quantity. In that modern overload of information, the things that are done right — excellence can no longer exist in its familiar state of subtlety. Today excellence must be shouted, over the buzz of all the other nonsense out there.

This is the reason that Dr. Parker is sitting down for an interview. They can no longer take for granted that the reputation of Surgical

Associates will speak for itself. "My father would not be happy with me," Dr. Parker muses. "The were so humble in those days. They did not want recognition." Both his grandfather and his great-grandfather served as dean of the Medical College of South Carolina. And of his father, also Dr. Parker, he explains, "At one time he had more experience with treating cancer of the esophagus than anybody in this country because cancer of the esophagus was basically endemic to the coastal and outer islands of South Carolina." This prevalence of esophagus cancer is attributed to the use of moonshine and tobacco.

Despite his international recognition, it was humility that best characterized Dr. Parker and his fellow surgeons. Dr. Telfair Parker tells a story about his father that has never been publicly known. "He would hate me for telling this," his smiles proudly and continues. One day his father, Dr. Parker, was making rounds at the medical college, and he heard that

the chief of surgery, a Dr. Gregory Cradle, had been put in the hospital during the night. "He went to visit him and Dr. Cradle collapsed in shock right then and there. Daddy whipped him down in the operating room. He had a ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm, and my dad saved his life. It was in the paper, but it said that the surgeon who operated on him requested that his name remain anonymous."

Dr. Telfair Parker continues this tradition of surgical excellence. He is an alumnus member of the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society and the recipient of the 1998 Community Teacher of the Year Award from the department of family medicine at MUSC. Dr. Parker has served as chief of staff of St. Francis Hospital and is president of its executive committee. He has served as chief of surgery at both Roper and St. Francis hospitals, and he is a member of numerous professional societies including the Charleston County Medical



Telfair Parker.

Society, the South Carolina Medical Association, the Medical Society of South Carolina, the American Medical Association, the South Carolina Surgical Society, the H. William Scott, Jr., Society, the Southern Surgeons Club and the Southern Surgical Association.

Dr. Parker has carried Surgical Associates of Charleston into the 21st century. "Today the practice "is comprised of the largest number of subspecialty-trained surgeons practiced in the art of abdominal and intestinal, breast, gallbladder and liver, oncology, thyroid and parathyroid, hernia and advanced laparoscopic surgeries.

"Extensive and advanced surgical and multi-specialty training allow the current members of Surgical Associates of Charleston to

perform a broad range of operations to benefit patients. These include intestinal, endocrine, biliary, oncological, breast, hernia and vascular surgical procedures. These are performed with conventional and advanced minimally invasive surgical approaches."

"This article serves as proof that both the times and medicine have changed. Yet the Surgical Associates of Charleston do not seek undue recognition. They remain humble gentlemen who are proud of their surgical legacy. Today they continue to serve the Lowcountry with steady hands and sound minds.

This article is part II of a three-part series.

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