

Tribute to Dr William T Hardaker Jr

Dr William T Hardaker Jr, MD, was born in December 24, 1941, in Charleston, South Carolina, to parents, William Hardaker Sr and Gale Angas Hardaker. He demonstrated tremendous leadership, dedication and commitment to his activities early on, rising to the rank of Eagle Scout. These qualities also allowed him to excel both academically and athletically where he went on to pursue BA in Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania. At Penn, he was both an active member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and was a 4 years starter on the football team. He was elected as a team captain in his senior year and graduated in 1963.



Following in the footsteps of both his father and grandfather, Dr Hardaker joined the military after graduation and spent 5 years as a marine aviator. During this time, he flew 285 combat missions in an F-4 Phantom and ultimately rose to the rank of Captain. After serving his country, Dr Hardaker completed a range of premedical school courses at the University of North Carolina, and then ultimately entered Duke Medical School in September of 1969. In 4 years of medical school, Dr Hardaker served as Class President twice and was the Student Body President his senior year. He thrived academically and was named to the Alpha Omega Alpha honor society before graduating in June 1973. From medical school, Dr Hardaker entered the Duke Orthopaedic Surgery Residency Program.

In the midst of medical school and residency, Dr Hardaker also had a growing family. He married his wife, Bobbie, July 22, 1967. They had their first child, Katherine Tracy Hardaker, November 6, 1972, during Dr Hardaker's final year of medical school. Ryan Elizabeth Hardaker was born in October 3, 1976, during Dr Hardaker's 4th year of residency. Their youngest child, William Mack Hardaker, was born in March 20, 1981.

After finishing residency, Dr Hardaker became a member of the Duke orthopaedic faculty where his practice included spine surgery, sports medicine, and pediatrics. Initially one of the 'low men' on the totem pole, Dr Hardaker regales residents with stories of performing posterior spinal fusions on Saturday afternoons ('That was my OR block! It was the only time they had for me.') and working late into the night applying casts with Dr Coonrad. Dr Hardaker always made time to be active in the community as well, serving as team physician for a wide variety of college sports, including Duke football, lacrosse, and basketball. Since 1978, Dr Hardaker also served as the attending orthopaedic surgeon for the American Dance Festival. He also acted as team physician for the Carolina Cobras as well as for Durham high school football teams, the Hillside Hornets and the Southern Spartans. These team commitments continued for decades, and he continues to be the acting attending physician for both Hillside and Southern, spending Friday evenings alongside his residents watching the games and caring for the athletes.

Like many Duke orthopaedic faculty during the 1980s and 1990s, Dr Hardaker was an active participant in the 'Crippled Children's Clinics', a free clinic system in which attending surgeons and residents would drive out to rural clinics one or more times per month to evaluate and treat children with orthopaedic conditions in underserved areas of North Carolina. Counties where Dr Hardaker has worked including Robeson, Carter, Sampson and Columbus. Dr Hardaker is now one of two attending physicians who have continued this service, taking two residents on the first Friday of each month to the health department clinic in Lumberton, where they spend the morning evaluating and treating children. For his service, Dr Hardaker has twice been named the Robeson County Physician of the Year, making him the only physician who practices outside of Robeson County to win this award (twice).

Of course, one of Dr Hardaker's most memorable responsibilities during his time at Duke has been through his role as Residency Program Director. The vetting and selection of applicants is something that has assumed his time and energy during application season for years. From first assuming the role of program director, Dr Hardaker has made it his mission to try to find and attract the best possible combination of residents. He is known for his in-depth knowledge of every applicant who interviews at Duke orthopaedics. Dr Hardaker is able to talk with each applicant not just about their educational history and research, but about their families, hometowns, personal interests, and goals. His residents regularly witness his unparalleled energy and enthusiasm for this process as he studies his flashcards of the applicants and routinely pulls residents aside to get feedback on each visiting student.



Dr Hardaker announcing the chief resident class of 2015



Left to Right: Dr Hardaker, Dr Christopher Jones, and Dr Richard Goldner at the Chief Resident Dinner June 2015



Dr Hardaker with members of the Hillside High school Football Team



Dr Tyler Watters (right) defers to Dr Hardaker for all major decisions, including wardrobe. It is rumored that Dr Hardaker even inspired Dr Watters' signature hairstyle



Left to Right: Dr Hardaker with Drs John Lewis and Julie Neumann at the health department in Lumberton getting ready for clinic



However, his job is not complete with just resident selection. Dr Hardaker has trained over 250 orthopaedic residents in the past 30 years. His capacity as a patient listener and caring mentor truly makes him a resident advocate. His unwavering dedication to, and constant presence in the residence program has rightfully earned his nickname as ‘The Rock,’ and he has been the foundation on which this residency program has been built. Last year, Dr Hardaker was named as one of the top five Program Directors in the country, by Doximity.

In recognition of his commitment and years of service to Duke orthopaedics, Dr William Hardaker was the guest of honor at the Annual Piedmont Orthopedic Society Meeting in May 2013. At this meeting, the creation of the ‘Hardaker Fund’ was first announced as a way to express admiration and gratitude for Dr Hardaker’s devotion to Duke. Through the generosity of Piedmont members, many of whom trained under Dr Hardaker’s leadership, the fund has grown and annually gets closer to being substantial enough to achieve its goal of being able to fund a trip to the Piedmont at least once for each orthopaedic resident during his/her training. There is truly no better way to honor a man who has devoted his life to Duke orthopaedics than to help encourage continued participation in the Duke orthopaedic family through the Piedmont Society.

Therefore, we dedicate the fifth edition of the Duke Orthopaedic Journal to ‘The Rock’, Dr William T Hardaker, Jr, MD. We thank him for his leadership, commitment, dedication to and faith in his residents and his department.

Note: Text is based on a tribute to Dr Hardaker given by Dr Mack Aldridge MD, at the Piedmont Orthopaedic Society Meeting May 2013.

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