

## Program Director for the Ages

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At the 61st annual meeting of the Piedmont Orthopaedic Society Bill Hardaker was the guest of honor. His address to the membership was entitled “On the Shoulders of Giants.” Typical of Bill, he chose to acclaim four icons of Duke Orthopaedics rather than place the spotlight on himself. It was a moving speech and I remember thinking that his public speaking skills have always been underrated; and that one day he would be added to the list of those he praised. That day has come.

Bill’s upbringing and early experiences were a remarkable preparation for his leadership role at Duke. His wife Bobby credits his extended family in creating an environment where a sense of justice permeated. Fairness, honesty, and loyalty were always emphasized. From his parents and grandparents, he learned the meaning of the words family, honor, courage, service, and sacrifice. Bobby goes on to further explain Bill’s traits: “Having moved so many times (17 schools before Penn) as part of a Navy family, I think he knew the importance of ‘belonging’ and feeling both welcomed and valued ... and he wanted others to feel likewise.”

Eagle Scout, Captain of the Penn football team, Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, combat tested Marine aviator, and medical school class president are just a few of the remarkable accomplishments that he achieved before his Duke Orthopaedic training began.

His standout performance as a Duke resident led to a faculty appointment by his mentor and chief, J Leonard Goldner. As an attending, he helped establish arthroscopic knee surgery at Duke as a viable treatment. He was a dedicated member of the spine team and took spine trauma call for 30 years, proficiently treating cervical and thoracolumbar spine trauma and publishing the results. Inspired by Ralph Conrad, he committed a significant portion of his practice to the treatment of scoliosis and was an active member of the Scoliosis Research Society.

He served the Durham community (surgeon for the American Dance Festival, team physician for local high school football programs) and the state of North Carolina including monthly outreach children’s clinics in historically underserved areas.

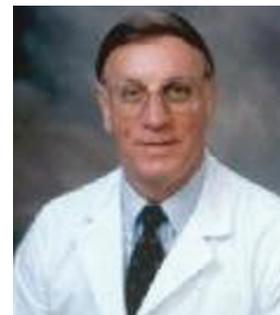
In 1979, Goldner sought to place a junior faculty member in charge of the residency program. He chose Bill Hardaker. Goldner was magical in his ability to select the right person for the job at hand. The choice to name Hardaker for this role had an impact similar to his decision to place Jim Urbaniak in charge of microvascular surgery. In both cases, great things happened.

Through the years, I have watched Bill take on various projects and assignments, and have studied his approach. Terms like total immersion, analysis, critique, and improvement come to mind. I do not know if Bill loved the Residency Program Director position initially, but it soon became his passion. He must have realized the positive impact he could have on so many developing orthopaedists. His life experiences prepared him for this role. He could recognize leadership skills. He could identify individuals who possessed the concept of “team.” He searched for clues about their work ethic. He understood the importance of diversity of background and strengths, while avoiding traits that would prevent a class from uniting and bonding.

His preparation for resident applicant interviews was legendary, and is chronicled in an article published in volume 1 of The Duke Orthopaedic Journal.

When an applicant committed to Duke Orthopaedics, Bill would do all that was necessary to effectuate a successful residency for that individual. He attended virtually every resident conference. His attendance at regional and national meetings was influenced most by the residents’ participation. Whether it was the Academy meeting, North Carolina Orthopaedic Society meeting, or Oscar Miller Day, Hardaker was there to proudly support them, watch them present their research, and congratulate them. He garnered their trust and they sought his advice. He served as a role model, portraying so many exemplary qualities. His current and former residents know that his passion and engagement in their lives was genuine.

Travis Dekker PGY3, in his tribute to Bill Hardaker, said “There will never be another program director like Hardaker, nor should there—we all may be biased here, but there is truly no program director within any specialty that compares—he was and is a LEGEND. This year alone, he read from front to back every 25+ page application, greater than 960 applications! He did so to find that ‘diamond in the rough’ that would make for the best resident and teammates he could assemble.”



Jonathan Godin PGY5 spoke these words: “Hardaker was a larger-than-life figure in the careers of countless medical students and residents throughout his 36 year tenure on the Duke Orthopaedic Surgery faculty, advising, cajoling and reminding us of the high standards to which we were being held. He expected greatness; he demanded hard work, teamwork and passion. While we were originally brought together for academic purposes, I soon began to learn from his views and perspectives and his wealth of knowledge that will always be fundamental to my understanding of the world.”

Jim Urbaniak, who officially appointed Bill as residency program director, had this to say: “Bill considered the applicants test scores, accomplishments and awards, but he emphasized the intangibles—team player, passion for learning, work ethic and accountability. He had a special sense of judging their character. You know what is extraordinary? Of the approximately 250 residents he selected over 30+ years, there were no dropouts, no failures no misfits! They have all been successful and had lasting relationships with their peers.”

There is no denying that the loss of Bill Hardaker has been a devastating blow to us. But largely, thanks to him, we are prepared to continue our mission without hesitation. With Bill as example, we will emerge from this adversity stronger, and with more resolve and commitment to our current and future residents. Innovations in resident education are currently underway. Strong leadership in education by Alman, Brigman, Leversedge, and the entire Duke Faculty will help us move forward.

As we now carry on with our professional and personal lives we have one more giant pair of shoulders to inspire us and to help guide us along the right path. Thank you Bill!

**Robert D Fitch MD**