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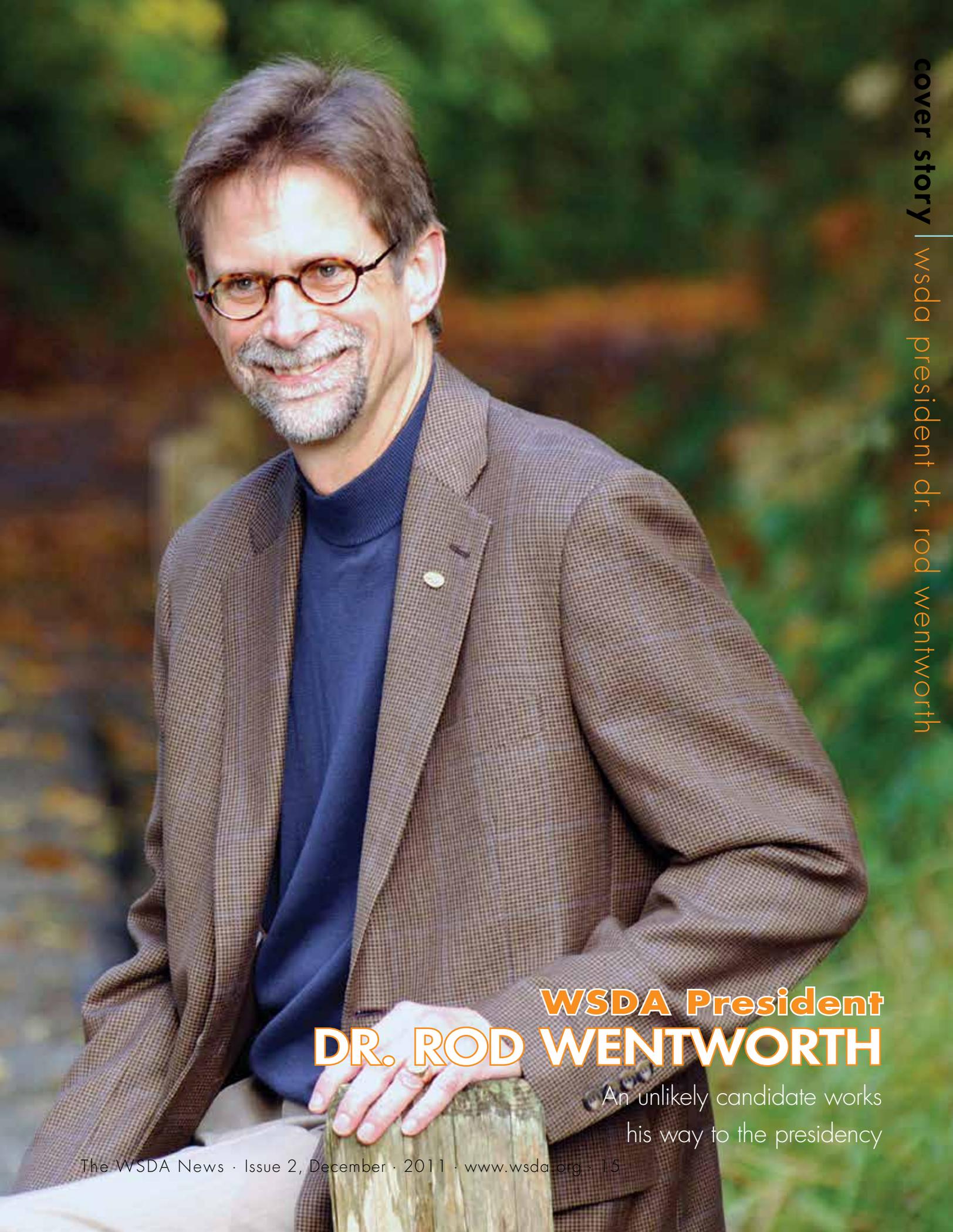
WSDA President

DR. ROD WENTWORTH

“True leaders allow everyone a chance to be heard while still running an efficient and effective meeting that is respectful of volunteers’ time and efforts. It is an art form that Rod Wentworth has more than mastered — he’s an expert. As a volunteer on any committee, he could be counted on for a pithy comment that wrapped up a discussion and moved the group forward.”

— Jennifer Freimund, Executive Director, SKCDS

Cover story photographs by Bev Sparks



WSDA President
DR. ROD WENTWORTH

An unlikely candidate works
his way to the presidency



In his element:
Dr. Wentworth fishing in Jurassic
Lake in Southern Argentina

Ask some people to talk about themselves and you've unleashed a beast; they'll yammer on in non sequiturs, lulled by the sound of their own voice for days at a throw.

Dr. Rod Wentworth is not *that* guy. Getting information out of him was like — if you'll pardon the pun — pulling teeth. “Oh yeah,” agreed fellow dentist and fishing buddy, Dr. Barry Feder, “He doesn't like to talk about himself.” In that case, it's often best to hand the mic to someone else and let them open up about the person — and thankfully, there is no shortage of people willing to extoll Wentworth's virtues.

Affable, quick to smile and offer a warm handshake, Wentworth presents professorially — lean, a little rumped and tweedy — he looks easy to talk to, and he is. It's that cordial demeanor which has won him friends at the component, state and national levels, where his interest in ethics has propelled him into leadership roles. In addition to dentistry and ethics, he's passionate about wine, fishing and family, not necessarily in that order.

He's the unlikeliest of officers, eschewing politics for the most part, saying “Politics is the part I dread about being president — I don't enjoy it whatsoever, and I feel that if I can go down to Olympia and deal with it, anybody can. I got involved in becoming an officer in the WSDA for the same reason that I enjoy my practice — it's the people I get to meet and interact with. I'm not a good self-promoter, that's one of the things I don't like about politics. Unfortunately it's integral to the process, which has made it harder for me. Dentists, in general, aren't particularly good at that, and I'm worse than most. I really don't care for politics at all — it's time consuming but it's part of giving back to the profession.”

The road to dentistry

Wentworth isn't from a family of dentists — his dad was in sales, his mother sold Avon, later worked for his dad, and by his reckoning “managed five kids” as a homemaker. No, his road to dentistry involved speed, asphalt and an Austin-Healey.

Wentworth, his dad and grandfather shared a passion for cars — his grandfather was a “wrench” for Ford in the early days, working on the 999 in Detroit, eventually starting one of the first mechanic shops in the area. Both father and grandfather raced cars some, and early on, it seemed that racing might be in Wentworth's blood, too. One summer in Dallas, he and his father were at a road race sponsored by Sports Car Club of America (SCCA), and one of the racers was a dentist by the name of Dr. Ed Gray. Wentworth recalls, “He drove an Austin-Healey, and he was beating all the

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Porsches he shouldn't have been beating in his class. My dad told me that if I became a dentist, I might someday be able to do the same kind of thing.”

Now, if you think that Wentworth went on, *with dogged determination*, to become a dentist so he could buy an Austin-Healey... well, you'd be wrong. But the story stuck with him. More importantly, Wentworth realized he had a real interest and aptitude for science and all the things necessary to become a dentist. Then, when he was 10 or 11, he ended up mentioning that interest to his family dentist, Dr. Don Letterman, who took that spark, showed him the ropes, and further nurtured Wentworth's interest in dentistry. The rest, as they say, is history.

Getting started

Wentworth is a tried-and-true Husky, earning both his undergraduate and dental degrees at the UW, where he graduated from dental school in 1981.

When he graduated, interest rates for business loans were 21 percent, and swinging financing simply wasn't within his grasp. He explains, “At the time, my friends who were able to buy were either from smaller communities, had connections, or had an agreement with the selling dentist. I had nothing like that, so I ended up as an associate for 14 years, which was both good and bad — my bottom line suffered, but I learned a lot.” For one thing, he discovered that financial gain wasn't really at the heart of what was important to him, saying, “I really enjoy the interaction with the patients and the satisfaction of treating them. I learned that having a dedicated patient base is what I would interpret as successful, as opposed to making lots of money. I went into the practice thinking that if I took care of people they would come back and refer me to their friends.”

Clearly, it's a model that has worked for Wentworth. It's been a long road to that success, however, and he worries about



Ford 999



the challenges facing new dentists today, saying, “The tech challenges for them are immense: the Internet is changing the way we, as dentists, advertise and market ourselves, and that has complicated things enormously. The perception of the rules is changing, and there are a lot of unanswered questions — like Groupon, for instance — it’s very murky stuff.” He continues, saying, “The jury is still out as to whether or not it is unethical, but I think people look at the Internet and marketing there as somehow different than print, and they feel that they can get away with more, and tend to be less concerned with it. In part, it’s because you have to rely on IT people who may not subscribe to your principles. Advertising was once unethical, and now it’s part of our normal routine and business plan. It’s hard to say where this will go.”

Today, Wentworth pays it back to students and new dentists by mentoring, something he wishes he’d had when he was in school. “These kids have way more energy than I did when I was a student — they manage to do more than we ever did. There are projects that people are involved with now that I couldn’t fathom even having the time to do. Their energy level bodes well for the future, but I have concerns about whether they are going to be able to get jobs right out of school. I would hope that some of that would be alleviated once the baby boomers start to retire, but the economy is so uncertain that it’s hard for young dentists to get financing to buy a practice — much like when I graduated. It’s almost as if we’ve come full circle.”

Coming up through the ranks

He credits classmates Dr. Mark Walker and Dr. Spence Jilek with encouraging him to become involved at the component level early on, saying, “There were a number of people from my class — Mark and Spence were two — who I knew were active in their local societies, and they set a good example for me. I enjoyed it, and I knew that I should be doing it, as well.” He got involved at the Seattle King-County Dental Society (SKCDS) because it was easy, interesting, and it satisfied his desire to play an active roll in organized dentistry.

A blossoming interest in ethics led him to serve on SKCDS’s Ethics Committee, which he later chaired. While on that committee, SKCDS President Dr. Karen Sakuma reasoned that the Ethics Committee should be responsible for attending and monitoring the Dental Disciplinary Board’s meetings (now called the Dental Quality Assurance Commission or DQAC). Wentworth’s time there only enhanced his interest in ethics, and he began to look for opportunities at the national level. Dr. Vic Barry, then 11th District Trustee, was a friend of Wentworth’s who advised him

about serving nationally. “When Vic Barry was 11th District Trustee,” Wentworth explains, “I asked him about appointments he was making to ADA’s Council on Ethics, By-laws and Judicial Affairs (CEBJA), and what I needed to do to be considered. He told me I should be more involved in leadership efforts at the component and state levels.”

Heeding Barry’s advice, Wentworth began to move through the chairs at SKCDS and serve on multiple committees, including forensic, strategic planning, nominations and others. Later, he would repeat the process at the state level, serving on multiple task forces and committees, and moving through the chairs to the presidency of WSDA. His work paid off, and in 2007 he was appointed to CEBJA by Dr. Mary Smith, finishing up his four-year term by serving as chair last year.

That early sense of duty has been a constant for Wentworth, who friends and colleagues credit with an ethical compass stronger than most — good friend Dr. C.R. Anderegg, Jr. says Wentworth is “the most ethical person I know — it controls his life,” and credits Wentworth with making him a better husband, father and person — all by following his good example.

For Wentworth, it’s simply the way he’s always lived his life. His parents instilled solid values in their kids — “I was brought up to be ethical — if we did something wrong, we had to own up to it and take the consequences of our behavior. If we made a mistake, we were taught that we had to confront the person we had wronged and make amends, and those principles guide me to this day.” He continues, saying, “I’ve always felt that as an individual, I wanted to do the best that I could for my patients and in everything that I do. I feel very strongly that in order to maintain relationships with patients, you need to have the utmost integrity and in doing that, that’s what ethics is all about.”

Not a dull boy

As the proverb says, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” and Wentworth slays the inner dullard with many interests outside of ethics and organized dentistry. A glance at his Facebook page tells the story — this guy is crazy about fishing — and not your everyday, garden-variety fishing, either. As he says, “I like to fish just about any way, although I haven’t done any hillbilly hand-fishing for catfish before... but it’s not entirely out of the question. I predominantly go fly fishing, but it’s a little tough to fly fish for halibut.”

The fire in his belly was lit early — Wentworth’s father was taking a fly-fishing class down at Greenlake, and he’d bring the boy along with him. They took to it, father and son, and it became a lifelong passion — fishing together until his father’s death in 1992.

These days, for a seasoned fisherman like Wentworth, it’s the exotic locales and the search for “weird fish,” as he calls them, that rev his engine. One such fish, the bonefish,

is prized for its strength and speed. According to Wikipedia, “The bonefish, also known as ‘phantom’ or ‘gray ghost’, is probably pound for pound the strongest and fastest moving animal of any salt-water fish.” Wentworth says he loves the challenge of trying to land the spirited fish, and his web pages are filled with examples of his success stories. Since the late 80s he’s been a part of a group called Pacific Professional Seminars, or PPS, a coalition of dentists dedicated to providing excellent CDE in locations prized for fishing. With them, he’s ended up travelling to some of his most exciting locations — places like the Bahamas, Christmas Island in the South Pacific, Brazil, Argentina, New Zealand and Nunavut (a federal territory of Canada), where he and his friends in PPS fish for bonefish, peacock bass and trout. Just one thing: don’t ask him to eat any of the fish he catches — because he doesn’t eat the stuff, ever.

In all that time of exotic fishing there must have been a hazard or two, and one involved a whale of a problem... literally. He explains, “While salmon fishing off Alaska’s Prince of Whales Island, a humpback whale breached under our boat, lifting us up and turning us ninety degrees before we came back down. My friend inadvertently snagged the big whale, taking out more than 100 yards of line before it broke off.”

Locally, Wentworth and close friends Barry Feder, C.R. Anderegg, Jr., and others have formed a group called the ABC Study Club, although the only thing they study may be fish. Each year they travel to the Haa Nee Naa Lodge on Dundas Island in British Columbia — a floating lodge that boasts some of the best salmon fishing in the world — for a retreat among friends and a chance to unwind. When pressed for fun stories about their retreats to the area, Anderegg could barely contain his laughter, saying, “I’m not much of a fisherman, but I have gone fishing many times with Rod — we’ve gone to Belize three times, and to the lodge nearly every year. Since Rod and I have known each other for years, we typically room together on these trips. At night, they turn the generators off and the place is pitch black and cold. One time, I needed to use the bathroom in the middle of the night, and I was trying to be quiet and find the flashlight that we kept in the room on the wall. I was groping in the darkness, and I without knowing it I was touching Rod’s foot — and he finally said ‘Can I help you?’, which scared the hell out of me. We really split a gut laughing that night.”

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Family and friends

When asked what his greatest success has been to date, Wentworth quipped “If I said marrying Jill, she’d slap me.” Truth is, they’re a fun and playful couple, autonomous but connected. Married in 1987, He and Jill share a love of art, wine, cats and travel, although traveling is something they do separately from time to time. Wentworth elaborates, “Jill is fluent in French and travels to France frequently with a group of friends to have fun and keep her language skills sharp. I’d rather fish, and Jill doesn’t fish. It all works out.” Anderegg marvels at their relationship, saying “In a marriage, love is a given. There is one of the few I know where both people are still friends. What’s so powerful about them is that they’re comfortable letting the other do things that interest them — then they get to come back together, share their experiences and reconnect as friends and spouses.” Wentworth met Jill, now an engineer at Boeing, after being set up by his office manager and a patient. She was a patient, but back then dating patients fell well inside ethical guidelines, unlike today. Wentworth is “grateful for the grandfather clause,” he says, smiling. Today, they collect art and are amassing an impressive collection of wines, something

Wentworth started doing just 15 years ago.

Although the couple has no children (other than their two cats Lucy and Stirling Moss), they do have a strong connection to the Anderegg’s brood — C.R. elaborates, “Since Rod and Jill do not have kids, they’ve been a part of our lives and that of our kids. They’ve been able to watch our kids growing up and have participated in their lives in a real and meaningful way, including attending sporting events and others our kids were involved in. My family is back east, and my wife’s family is in Norway, so they really are our surrogate family here, and we often spend holidays together. They’ve been an important part of our lives. If I do something I always check it out through him, so it’s just been a wonderful friendship.”

Making unlikely work

So, while Wentworth may in some ways truly be the unlikeliest of Presidents for the WSDA — this regular guy who shuns politics, doesn’t like to give speeches, and really hates to talk about himself — in many ways, he represents the core values so many dentists share: a love of life, a strong ethical compass, a keen scientific mind, and diverse interests — he represents you.

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