

The Zegarellis: TEACHING DENTISTRY AT COLUMBIA FOR SEVENTY YEARS



David Zegarelli '69, Peter Zegarelli '78, Dean Edward Zegarelli '37

The Zegarelli brothers, David '69 and Peter '78, agree that their father, Edward Zegarelli '37, dean of SDOS from 1973 to 1978, was "universally loved and admired," and always described as "the best teacher I ever had – anywhere." In his dedication to teaching, they say, "he wore out the rug," walking up and down while practicing his lecture. Though faultlessly prepared, he always gave the impression of being an impromptu speaker. In his honor, CDM presents the Edward V. Zegarelli Teaching Award annually to an outstanding faculty member.

Asked to bring the school's antiquated clinical facilities up to par with its phenomenally good educational programs at a time when other dental schools were closing, Dr. Zegarelli said he hoped that he would not be "the last Dean." In fact, he did pull the school out of physical decline through successful fund raising, rebuilding three entire floors of the school. Being a child of the Depression, his sons say, made him "a fighter." Choosing dentistry because a high school essay on careers was assigned the day he had a dental appointment, he first entered Fordham. Finding himself placed in a pharmacy program, he soon left for Columbia. The Dr. Edwin S. Robinson Professor of Dentistry, Dean Zegarelli was a lifelong distinguished scientist in oral medicine, widely published and honored in his field. He died in 2001.

Dr. David Zegarelli knew he would be a dentist by the time he was 10. As an undergraduate at Columbia, he was on crew, played football, and studied zoology and art history. At SDOS, he became enamored of microscopy, eventually making oral pathology his life work. His postgraduate studies were in anatomic pathology at P&S, at SUNY, and at Roswell Park Memorial Institute – an important, in-depth residence. He was impressed by the Institute's "Cigarette Hall of Fame," inscribed with names of celebrities who died of tobacco-related diseases like lung cancer, and by its success in getting signed autopsy permissions from 99 percent of entering patients. Director of Columbia's Oral Pathology Division, Dr. Zegarelli has risen from assistant to full professor during his 35 years at Columbia. He examines and identifies thousands of pathology specimens annually, and has more than 60 publications to his credit.

Dr. Peter Zegarelli also attended Columbia College, the only pre-dental student to declare "from the get-go." Asked if he had decided between Harvard and Yale for graduate school, he chose to follow his father and brother to Columbia, receiving "a great education." Being son of the dean and brother of a faculty member was, "a bit difficult... I was probably graded a little harder." Columbia was also where he met his wife, Carol. While visiting her sister, an SDOS student (Eleanor Olsen '84), Carol broke a tooth. It was Rosh Hashana and Peter, an Italian Catholic, was on duty alone when the sisters came to the medical campus for help. Struck by his patient's beauty, Peter asked her sister for Carol's phone number. They are still happily married.

Following a residency at Booth Memorial, Peter Zegarelli entered general dentistry and has built a "terrific practice, with wonderful patients." An assistant clinical professor at CDM, Dr. Zegarelli also holds two patents: an eyeglass frame supporting a standard face mask – which prevents headaches – and the first disposable mask for patients protecting both eyes and nose, all marketed by Crosstex. Dr. Zegarelli anticipates more patents.