

# **Michael R. Fey, DDS, MSD**

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## **GROWING UP AND EDUCATION**

Born in 1946 in Wichita, Kansas, Mike Fey lived there until he was 16. His father, who worked for the Boeing company, was transferred to Seattle, Washington, area in 1961. While there were no other dentists in the family, Mike had an early interest in biology during junior high school and started college with the plan of going into pharmacy and possibly medicine.

Mike transferred from the local community college to the University of Washington and entered the School of Pharmacy. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1967 because of a lack of appropriate credits to maintain a military deferment ("playing too much tennis," he says!) and served with the infantry (1st Air Cavalry) in a tour of duty in Vietnam in 1968. Mike was awarded two Purple Hearts and the Bronze Star during that time. After finishing his military duty, he returned to the University of Washington to complete his B.S. degree in Pharmacy, which he received in 1971.

## **DENTAL SCHOOL AND CAREER IN ORTHODONTICS**

While working as a pharmacy intern at Swedish Hospital in Seattle, Mike recognized that a career in medicine might pose greater challenges to family life than he had anticipated. He decided to enter the dental profession and matriculated at the UW School of Dentistry in 1971, graduating in 1975. He was accepted into the first class of the combined Podo-Ortho Graduate Program at the UW (along with his sole classmate Dr. Patrick Turley) and attended the program from 1975 to 1978.



Donna  
and  
Mike,  
2003

After completion of the combined program, Mike took a position at Children's Hospital in Seattle as Associate Director of the Dental Department. During his five years at the hospital, he was Program Director of the Pediatric Dental Residency, head of the orthodontic services, and member of the craniofacial team. In addition to the position at Children's Hospital, he associated with Dr. Allan Van Ness in Bothell, Washington, one day per week in private practice. As the private practice grew, he decided to leave Children's Hospital and returned to the Orthodontic Department at the UW on a half-time basis, spending more time in private practice. During this period, a strong friendship developed with Dr. Stan Hall, as they shared the duties of directing the undergraduate orthodontic curriculum. In addition, Dr. Roy Gunsolus joined their clinic day with the graduate residents, and the three of them continued to teach on Fridays for over 10 years. Dr. Fey considers his teaching and collaborative work with Stan and Roy to have been among the most rewarding time in his career. Mike also considers Drs. Dick Riedel and Bob Little to be his main teaching mentors, along with his fellow members of the Puget Sound Orthodontic Study Club. Mike's private practice grew to a full-time practice, which is now shared with his oldest daughter, Kristina Grey, a 1998



## Portrait of a Professional

UW orthodontic graduate who somehow manages to balance a family life with three young children, coaching youth sports, teaching in the UW Graduate Ortho Program, and a busy practice.

### FAMILY LIFE

Mike met his wife Donna in Pharmacy School in 1967 and became engaged prior to his departure to the military. Donna continued on to complete her degree and practiced pharmacy for approximately 15 years. Following much pleading, she was convinced to leave her career and become Mike's office manager, a position she retains to this day. In addition to Kristina, there is a son Jeff, who is married with one child, and a daughter Karey. In addition, the Feys have two adopted godsons, Anthony and Michael, both of whom have one child. Mike considers his family to be his number one priority in life. He enjoys fly fishing with his son, along with photography and travel.

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Mike has been dedicated to teaching throughout his orthodontic career, even taking a short sabbatical from the University of Washington in order to serve as a counselor at the high school level for a couple of years in Seattle. He has served as President of the Washington State Society of Orthodontists and has been a member of the PCSO Financial Committee. He lectures to the orthodontic graduate students at the UW.

### CIVIC WORK IN VIETNAM

For the first time since his tour of duty, Mike returned to Vietnam with Donna in 2001 to visit, despite having previously vowed never to return to the land that so disrupted and nearly ended his life. As for many returning veterans, he was curious as to what had happened to a country that had played such a significant part in their lives. Mike says that until that time he had essentially suppressed any thoughts or recollections about the Vietnam War or the



*The Fey family  
in 1999,  
Winthrop,  
Washington.*

experiences during his year there. Naturally, this return stirred up many emotions. Following a suggestion by Dr. Rich Litchfield of Eugene, Oregon, the Feys visited a dental institute in Hanoi during that initial trip to see how dental care was provided within the socialistic system. Rich had been visiting and coaching some of the orthodontic staff for several years prior, and although Mike and Donna spent only half a day at the institute, a most significant outcome developed from this visit.

Mike has taken the initiative to become a consultant and participant in the development of the new National School of Odonto-Stomatology in Hanoi, the first school in Vietnam dedicated solely to dental education. In addition, he has taken on the responsibility of helping to develop the Departments of Orthodontics and Pediatric Dentistry. He says that his past teaching experience in Pedo-Ortho, along with courses taken in the UW Department of Education in instructional methodology and curriculum design, have guided him in these endeavors. He has founded a nonprofit and non-governmental organization (Alliance for Advancement of Dentistry in Vietnam) to assist in the development of future dental educators in that country.

It has been important that the educators and the dental school provide a foundation for the teaching and practice of orthodontics, with a solid scientific and clinical background. The Vietnamese want to achieve credibility in the fields of dentistry and orthodontics, as do other developing countries. There is a population of 80 million in Vietnam, and there are 275 dentists who graduate each year. The government runs everything and teaching is done in



## Portrait of a Professional

*At the Dental Institute in Hanoi, with most of the faculty and staff (2003).*



English. As color slides rapidly deteriorate with the heat and humidity in Vietnam, electronic media are essential, along with any available print media. Mike says that his first tour of duty in Vietnam was backed by "fire power," while his current tour is backed by "PowerPoint." As it is possible for him to go to Vietnam only periodically, using the Internet is very helpful in communicating and developing the programs in the dental school in Hanoi.

In addition to these dental school activities, both Mike and Donna participate in an organization called Peace Tree Vietnam, which funds the removal of unexploded ordnance and land mines in an area where he had spent much of his time of duty in Vietnam. Education and family subsistence is also provided for those unfortunate victims who accidentally detonated these residual explosives. Mike currently serves on the Board of Directors for the organization and is obviously quite passionate about the activities he is rendering for Vietnam.

It was especially gratifying for him to be taking part in the rehabilitation of an area which in earlier years he essentially participated in trying to destroy. Since the Vietnamese government does not allow any official memorials to foreign casualties of war, the planting of trees and community restoration have become symbols of remembrance for American men and women lost in the war. Mike had the honor of

making such a dedication to members of his Army unit who lost their lives in 1968 during the actions in Khe Sahn and Quang Tri.

### CONCLUSION

Mike feels that PCSO members should not be afraid to say "yes" when asked to participate in an event or organization—it is amazing how much more you continue to learn when you actively participate. In 2004, Mike was awarded the first Washington State Society of Orthodontists Distinguished Service Award, which was well deserved. In presenting this award to Mike last year, [current incoming WSSO President] Dr. Paul Lund related:

"What I personally honor him for is the quality of the man. His integrity, his commitment to education. His commitment to his community, schools, his practice—and he has a beautiful practice. His commitment to his family, to his profession—he has a beautiful daughter who joined him in practice—what a lucky guy. His commitment to history—to Vietnam—to rebuild Vietnam. But most of all what I respect is that with all this, Mike Fey is always approachable, always willing to help. If any of you haven't met him yet, you should introduce yourself. He is a great and very humble guy who happens to be an orthodontist."

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## Portrait of a Professional



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**Mike in Vietnam  
2003-2004**



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