

Alumni Feature – State of the Profession: A Reflection

U.S. News & World Report once again ranked the orthodontic profession among the top 5 best jobs, recognizing great jobs as ones that challenge us, are a good match for our talents and skills, pay well, aren't too stressful, offer room to advance and provide a satisfying work-life balance. The ability to remedy dental health problems while building meaningful relationships with our patients certainly affords us a gratifying career. Whether a new graduate, an orthodontist who has reached retirement, or someone in the middle of their career, we hope this to be true. Over the course of 2017, each of our six NESO eNews publications will feature a state of the profession as depicted by a NESO alumni in each decade of life (30's-80's). We've asked our alumni to share some of their personal background and experience to shed light on how the profession has evolved, offer explanation of the changes that have occurred, outline how the responsibilities of an orthodontist vary over the course of one's career and make a projection of where our top-ranked profession is headed.

OUR FIRST FEATURE: DR. RON CORTESE



Dr. Cortese received his undergraduate and dental degrees from the University of Buffalo prior to completing a general dental residency in Germany while serving in the U.S. Army. He practiced for eight years before returning to school at Columbia to complete his post-graduate training in orthodontics. For the past four and a half decades Dr. Cortese has practiced orthodontics in his native Rochester, New York.

State of the Profession Through The Loupes of Dr. Ron Cortese:

After 58 years in the dental field, it is my pleasure and honor to reflect on how our profession has evolved. Right after my graduation from dental school in 1959 I was given two weeks to report to Fort Sam Houston for basic training. I had been drafted into the U.S. Army. In January of my final year of school, I had however noticed that Germany had a large number of Army installations, and being single at the time and wanting to experience some European skiing, I asked to be sent over seas. In mid August of the same year, I was sent to Stuttgart, Germany. The final months of school had been a whirlwind; in preparing for graduation and my move overseas, I had also met my future wife, and we had become engaged. She joined me in Germany four months in, and we married. We spent as much time off as I could muster while serving in the Dental Corp, skiing in Austria, Switzerland and France. After my tour of duty ended, we returned to my hometown, Rochester, N.Y.

I had become interested in orthodontics during my senior year of dental school, and while practicing as a general dentist in Rochester for eight years, this interest was always present on my mind. To sharpen my knowledge, I enrolled in an occlusion course through the University of Buffalo, and made the hour drive three days a week to complete this summer course. With the support of my family, I took the leap, applied, and was accepted into the orthodontic program at Columbia. At that time, at least on the East Coast, two techniques were taught, the Edgewise and Begg techniques. A friend from the Army had completed the residency prior to my acceptance and greatly influenced me in light wire mechanics, notably the Begg technique.

I started looking at facial profiles on my patients and began keeping records on extraction vs. non-extraction cases and was pleasantly surprised how using the light wire technique and differential forces, my cases looked pretty good. While I knew that most of our associates were Edgewise providers, as I began my quest to become Board Certified, I decided to show my Begg cases for my Board Examination. In March of 1988 I successfully became Board Certified for life.

After 58 years in practice, I have witnessed many advances as our profession has evolved. Orthodontics has certainly changed since the days of full metal bands on all of the teeth! Most recently, I have noticed our profession changing with the advent of Invisalign; the modality has altered the course of treatment with excellent results. Technology is developing more rapidly than ever before, and change occurring as a result. While the future of new technology and the impact on our profession can't be predicted exactly, what I do know is that we as clinicians must grow with these changes so that our specialty can continue to be the one that improves the esthetic and oral health of our future patients. ▶