Remembering Dr. Mort Divack

By Dr. David L. Hoexter, Editor In Chief

“Anyone here from the Bronx?”

It was a question that changed his life, and the lives of others. Dr. Mort Divack asked that question as he entered an apartment to attend a social event many years ago. At that party was a vivacious, lovely lady named Ruth. Smitten, Mort married her, and the world has never been the same. Two daughters, grandchildren, respect from colleagues, participation in dental organizations — as well as tireless support and advocacy for dental education for all participants in the oral health field. When Mort and Ruth were together, everyone won.

Mort passed away this July. A loss of an amazing talent in the dental field. At the outset of his participation in organized dental-industry support, he joined a local dental society, the First District Dental Society (now called the New York County Dental Society). He volunteered on several committees before becoming an elected officer. Always at his side at every meeting, driving him from his office in Queens to the dental meetings, staying involved through the entire meeting, and then driving home — was Ruth. What a team! Always at every meeting and always with smiles.

Being an officer in the First District (the largest local dental society in the country) requires near-endless extra time and effort on top of your practice. Yet Mort, while already providing leadership and guidance as president of the society — organizing education and encouraging new and young colleagues by example to join and participate in organized dentistry — he simultaneously accepted the additional responsibility of being the society’s representative and member of the Greater New York Dental Meeting organization. The positions demanded an abundance of altruistic energy combined with a deep appreciation of dental organizations and their role in best serving and protecting patients through dental education and open dissemination of the field’s growing base of knowledge for all. He and Ruth were together through it all.

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Not bad for a dentist practicing in Queens, serving a dental society representing Manhattan and the Bronx.

At the Greater New York Dental Meeting, Mort’s enthusiastic participation, love of dental education, appreciation of his colleagues and teammates — combined with his commitment to subject dissemination to the public and dental professionals — led to his election as chairman of the GNYDM. He naturally transitioned from representing the largest local dental society in the country to leading the country’s largest dental meeting. And again, Ruth was at his side at all the meetings. Following his term as GNYDM chairman, Mort worked tirelessly for the ADA, especially in education, while also serving on numerous committees for the national meeting.

Continuing with his giving after completion of his service with the ADA, Mort took on the challenge of being the chairman of the New York County local district dental society’s continuing education program. It was during these years that Mort encouraged me to present to the field on the newest modalities in periodontics and implants. He was always supportive of my efforts with helpful feedback and encouragement. One year when Mort and Ruth were vacationing in Europe, he had provided me with the dates. I secretly planned a surprise. When they arrived in Italy, they were greeted with my friend’s invitation to a personal estate for a private concert and grand feast. All this was to tell Mort and Ruth they were special and appreciated.

About 10 years ago, the GNYDM showed Mort how much it appreciated his experience and talent by inviting him to be a participating member of the GNYDM leadership team. The meeting organizers were thrilled when Mort accepted at a time when most of his colleagues were long since retired from practice and no longer involved in dental organizations. What a wonderful moment for Ruth, Mort and the GNYDM.

It is impossible to summarize Mort’s contributions in a few paragraphs — his love for family, his passion for dental politics and his gift of valuable time and energy to dental organizations. He lived a full, complete life, passing on at 96. His passion lives on through those who knew him and admired him — and most of all through his grandchildren, his Sandy and Daniel, his energetic Stacie and, of course, Ruth, his inseparable partner.