Dental school’s virtual museum highlights dentistry’s history with five online exhibits

Images, text document evolution of dental chairs, handpieces, business cards and more

Five new exhibits showcasing artifacts of dental history are now available for viewing on the recently launched website www.dentalmuseum.pacific.edu, which was created by the University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry. The exhibits are also accessible to the school community on digital kiosks located on the first and fourth floors of the school. The digital exhibits are part of the ongoing Virtual Museum Project, which began in 2012 as a creative way to present the school’s A. W. Ward Museum collection. For the past two years, Dr. Dorothy Dechant, curator of the A.W. Ward Museum, has been working closely with school photographer Jon Draper to photograph artifacts of all shapes and sizes—from tiny dental burs to heavy antique dental chairs.


Dechant said that the idea for the virtual museum took shape in conversations with former dean, Patrick J. Ferrillo, Jr., in 2012, when discussing how the museum would transition to its space in the new school building, which opened last summer in downtown San Francisco. A virtual presentation was the solution that would allow broader access to the museum and digitally showcase artifacts that have been in storage due to space limitations. Some of the artifacts have now been gifted to other dental museums or sold at auction.

A team of colleagues in the school’s design and photo, marketing and communications, and information technology departments worked with Dechant to put finishing touches on the website and kiosk exhibits.

“Please Have a Seat: Evolution of the Dental Chair” charts the dental chair over a 300-year span. Prior to the 17th century, tooth extractions were performed with patients sitting on the floor, their heads wedged between the dentist’s knees. Dentists then took matters into their own hands, constructing their own dental chairs until the mid-1800s, when commercial manufacturers took over. The chair has come a long way since then, and today’s design maximizes patient comfort while providing the dentist with adjustability that provides optimal access to the oral cavity.

“A Dynamic Decade: Speeding Up the Handpiece” includes this bit of history: Bur speeds increased dramatically in the 1950s when the idea of using turbines in airplane design inspired a new patent for the air turbine handpiece, accelerating the average handpiece from 6,000 rpm to 250,000 rpm. Pacific’s very own Dr. Arthur A. Dugoni (then serving as assistant clinical professor of operative dentistry at the College of Physicians & Surgeons, which later became Pacific Dugoni) was one of the first to share his confidence in the new high-speed handpiece.
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Stony Brook University School of Dental Medicine unveils ‘Henry Schein Cares Reception Area’

Event commemorates company’s $2 million of ongoing support to school programs

Stony Brook University School of Dental Medicine and Henry Schein Inc., one of the world’s largest providers of health care products and services to office-based dental, animal health and medical practitioners, unveiled the new “Henry Schein Cares Reception Area,” the gateway to the school’s dental care center, the largest dental care treatment facility on Long Island.

More than 60 attendees from Henry Schein and the School of Dental Medicine, including students, faculty and senior leadership, celebrated at the recent unveiling ceremony.

The naming of the reception area commemorates the collaborative relationship between the two organizations and recognizes more than $2 million in financial and in-kind support that Henry Schein has provided to the school over the past several years through Henry Schein Cares, the company’s global corporate social responsibility program.

One of the initiatives between Henry Schein and the SBU School of Dental Medicine is advancing the use of digital dental technology in the dental curriculum, with the goal of improving patient care and increasing efficiency and productivity. Henry Schein product donations to the dental care center include a PlanScan CAD/CAM dental restoration system and digital X-ray equipment.

“We are very fortunate to have a company like Henry Schein right here on Long Island,” said Dr. Mary Truhlar, dean of the Stony Brook University School of Dental Medicine. “Henry Schein is a global leader in serving the dental community with a deep commitment to the advancement of technology and increased access to care through social outreach. It is only fitting that we name the Henry Schein reception area, which is representative of the caring spirit of the company it represents.”

Henry Schein also supports Stony Brook dental student volunteer efforts in underserved communities around the world through the company’s Henry Schein Cares Student Outreach Program. Stony Brook dental students and faculty also join with Henry Schein, its supplier partners and oral health volunteers throughout the country to provide care to hundreds of thousands of children in need through the American Dental Association’s Give Kids A Smile® program.

“We are so pleased to support the education, training and clinical experience of Stony Brook students who use the advanced technology of this dental center to shape the future of the profession,” said Stanley M. Bergman, chairman and chief executive officer of Henry Schein. “We value every facet of our relationship with SBU School of Dental Medicine, from the clinical equipment and technology we have helped to advance, to the student outreach programs and community outreach initiatives in which we have partnered.”

(Sources: Henry Schein and Stony Brook)

A wealth of information is stored in the A.W. Ward Museum of Dentistry and Dechant has unique insight into the school’s place in the histories of dentistry and San Francisco. One of the exhibits, “There & Back Again: Our San Francisco Story,” charts the school’s circular path through the city to its most recent move to its current Fifth Street location — almost the same spot as the school’s original location in 1896.

The “Still Lives in Dentistry” and “Business Cards of the Victorian Dentist” exhibits showcase images of ornate objects from the 1800s and 1900s. Many of the photographs of the smaller artifacts were taken using a new photo tent set up, which enabled Dechant to control the lighting of the objects, minimizing shadows and isolating the subject from the background.

Future exhibits being planned

What’s next for the virtual museum? Dechant said that she would like to work on an exhibit comparing items used in the dental school’s early years with modern instruments used by Pacific Dugoni students today. She thinks viewers would be particularly interested in seeing the materials and methods students once used and learned — such as the gold foil technique and casting taught at the dental school up until 1980.

The A.W. Ward Museum of Dentistry was founded in 1974 in honor of one of the school’s early graduates and a pioneer of surgical periodontics, Abraham Wesley Ward, BDS class of 1902. Since its inception, the collection has grown through donations, made primarily by alumni. Most of the artifacts date from the mid-1800s to mid-1900s. Donated items are catalogued, with description and donor information maintained in an EmbARK database.

The school’s Institute of Dental History and Craniofacial Study maintains four collections, the Ward Museum being one, to support the preservation and study of dental history, craniofacial biology and evolution.

Students, researchers and dental professionals interested in studying the collections may contact Dr. Dorothy Dechant, museum curator, at (415) 929-6672 or didechant@pacific.edu.

(Sources: University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry)