Samuel O. Dorn, DDS, received the American Association of Endodontists’ highest honor, the Edgar D. Coolidge Award, given for leadership and exemplary dedication to dentistry and endodontics, during the AAE Annual Session, held earlier this year in Honolulu.

Dorn has given much of his time to the AAE and various other dentistry associations while also dedicating his career to education. Since 2009, he has served as professor and chair of the department of endodontics and director of the advanced specialty education program in endodontics at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. Previously, he was a professor of endodontics at the University of Florida while also maintaining a private practice in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

He is also the founding director of postgraduate endodontics at Nova Southeastern University. During his career he has received many awards honoring his dedication to the dental community, has authored numerous articles and textbook chapters and has lectured extensively throughout the United States, Europe and Latin America while representing and supporting endodontics.

In addition to serving as president of the AAE from 2002 to 2003, Dorn served as director and treasurer of the American Board of Endodontics and is a past president of several local endodontic organizations.

After the AAE meeting, Dorn answered some questions for roots.

What are your thoughts on receiving the Coolidge Award?

I feel very honored and humbled to receive an award for doing what I loved to do and for giving back to the profession that has given me and my family a good life. Our patients are the recipients of the AAE’s striving to save teeth. Our aim is to improve the health of the patients we serve. I am very humble to be listed with many of the giants of the endodontic profession as we continue to have forward-thinking leaders who are future recipients of this award.

What made you decide to go into endodontics?

When I graduated from dental school I wanted to be a general dentist, because I truly enjoyed every facet of dentistry. When I was in the Air Force at Bolling Air Force Base, three of us were selected to rotate through the different specialties. My first rotation was endodontics, and it turned out to be just what I liked. I was able to help people by relieving their pain, and I found that working in small spaces suited my personality since I liked constructing model cars and planes as a kid.
Is there one thing you like best about the specialty?

I am very proud of the specialty of endodontics and what we have done to help our patients save their teeth. Since we first became a specialty in 1963, endodontists have been in the forefront of education for the general dentists, as evidenced by the fact that more than 80 percent of the endodontic treatments in the United States are done by the GPs. The practice of endodontics is exciting in that we are constantly evolving with new instruments and techniques, whether it’s the use of rotary NiTi files, microscopes, cone-beam computed tomography or regeneration of the pulp. I am also excited about new advances yet to be discovered.

Looking back on your career, who influenced you the most?

There are actually two people who influenced me the most. The first was Dr. Louis Glatt, chair of endodontics at Fairleigh Dickinson University, who instilled in me a love for, and the importance of, endodontics as a future career path. He helped me to decide where to apply and, once I was accepted, encouraged me to volunteer as faculty at the school. He had me teach in the clinic my first semester and then gave me the assignment of developing a syllabus for the senior honors course in endodontics, which I truly enjoyed. His enthusiasm for teaching stayed with me during my graduate program and into my private practice days.

The second person to influence me was Dr. Richard Moodnik, my program director. He taught me that I could teach and become board certified even while operating a private practice. His knowledge and enthusiasm stayed with me for the rest of my career.

On a personal note, is there something that people might be surprised to know about you?

I have worked since I was 12 years old, when I had a job delivering newspapers. In order to get through dental school I drove a taxicab in New York City. I still keep my taxi driver’s license over my desk to remind myself how far I have come since those days.

Do you have anything you would like to add?

Endodontic treatment, when done correctly, yields extremely high success and survivability rates, which our profession is always striving to increase. We have an AAE Foundation to help support endodontic research and education with an endowment of more than $20 million contributed mostly by members and industry, and that allows us to use more than $1.5 million per year for these research and education endeavors. This endowment benefits our patients, as well as the future of our profession. I therefore would like to encourage everyone who reads this interview to donate or to increase their donation.