

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston



ENDOWMENT PROFILE

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Innovation and Dedication: Denton Cooley's Gift Tells His Father's Story

ONE OF THE FIRST GRADUATES of the Texas Dental College, Houstonian Ralph Clarkson Cooley, D.D.S., was a pioneer with an international reputation who transformed the field of restorative dentistry. His patients included some of the city's most prominent leaders in the early years of the last century.

A bon vivant, entrepreneur and brilliant professional, Cooley refined dental techniques and inspired others in the advancement of dentistry. He was perhaps best known for his invention of Copalite, a varnish to coat and desensitize a tooth before a cavity was filled, produced at his home. His family, including the younger of his two sons, Denton, was by his side for many of his professional milestones.

On Father's Day 2011, Denton A. Cooley, M.D., surgeon-in-chief, founder and president emeritus of the Texas Heart Institute at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, announced a gift to The University of Texas School of Dentistry at Houston in memory of his father, who died in 1954.

His generous tribute — the largest single gift ever made to the UTHealth School of Dentistry — honors his father's legacy as an innovator through the endowment of a professorship in dentistry, and his commitment to professional excellence in providing funds to build a faculty center on the new South Campus of The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth).

"I consider this a real opportunity to demonstrate my pride and affection for my dad and do something that would have pleased him," says Cooley. "The

older I get, the more grateful I am for his influence on my life and development."

John Valenza, D.D.S., dean of the dentistry school, said the gift perpetuates Dr. Ralph Cooley's creativity and spirit of invention. "At a time when dentistry was focused on instruments and techniques, but not materials, he inspired many dentists," says Valenza. "He showed that there was a lot to be gained in patient care by the development of materials."

Valenza will look for talents like Ralph Cooley's when the school begins its search for a biomaterials clinician/scientist to fill the Ralph C. Cooley Distinguished Professorship in Biomaterials, the first of its kind at the UT School of Dentistry. Professorships in such a specialty are fairly rare at public dental schools, Valenza notes.

The gift also supports the construction of UTHealth's first multipurpose facility for UTHealth faculty. The 14,000 square-foot Denton A. Cooley, M.D. and Ralph C. Cooley, D.D.S. University Life Center, slated to open in 2012, will serve as a setting for professional conferences, meetings and other events. In providing a setting to foster professional growth, the new center will accomplish what Denton Cooley believes his father had wanted to do when he retired from practice.

Although Denton Cooley enrolled at The University of Texas at Austin as a pre-dental student, he later switched to pre-med. Ralph Cooley was disappointed at first, but he grew proud of his son's developing career in medicine.

Denton Cooley went on to perform the



Denton A. Cooley, M.D.

first successful human heart transplant in the United States. The pioneer of many techniques used in cardiovascular surgery today, he has helped develop at least 200 surgical products, including the heart/lung machine.

The elder Cooley did not live to see his son's greatest triumphs, but he might not have been surprised to see that he was transforming his field. Cooley believes his own bent toward invention in cardiac surgery was a legacy from his father.

On the subject of legacy, Denton Cooley reflects, "I think that we ought to all recognize the fact that our individual record is going to be forgotten, but what is going to continue is the institutions, that which we've helped to enlarge and create."

If you'd like more information about how to start an endowment, please contact:

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