



Dr. Dunlap -- A carpenter at heart

Few people think of doctors as builders, but listening to Dr. Jim Dunlap talk about his profession, images of pounding mallets and sawing blades abound.

"There's something very satisfying about putting a mangled extremity back together again," he admits, noting the mechanics of healing drew him to orthopedic surgery.

"I love to be sawing and pounding. It's a lot like woodworking. Orthopods love the saws, hammers and chisels. It's a great feeling to pound in a hip prosthesis," he grins earnestly.

Shades of Tim Taylor's "Tool Time?" Not in the least, says Dunlap, who takes turns with Dr. Jim Perry traveling to Davenport every Thursday to see patients. Think more in the line of master carpentry or wood sculpture.

"It's like being an artist," he says, with bones as his raw material and helping folks to live life to its fullest as his finished product.

"Working with bones and joints is not cut and dried. There's a lot of eyeballing just like in carpentry work. It takes some real artistry to reconstruct bones and joints."

It's that painstaking, delicate work that makes orthopedic surgery so rewarding.

"It's definitely not all sawing and hammering. I can throw on my magnification glasses and fix small nerves. There are many fine details to it," he says. "It's really fun. I enjoy it."

The son of a Billings, Montana dentist, Dr. Dunlap always knew he'd go into some type of health care field. That's why he got a degree in chemical engineering. OK, so the two are barely related, but he did find motivation in the biological engineering portion of his studies at the University of Colorado.

"I didn't want to work in an oil refinery and bio-engineering, which I really enjoyed, related to medicine through drug delivery," he says, admitting it's a less than straight path to orthopedics. "Besides, you don't have to take a lot of medical-related courses to get in to medical school."

Dr. Dunlap traveled to New Orleans to attend medical school at Tulane University where he became a general surgeon. Eventually, he discovered the hammers and saws and came to Spokane to practice his craft.

Dr. Dunlap is one of 19 orthopedic surgeons at Northwest Orthopaedic Specialists, and one of only three who bring this much-needed specialty to rural hospitals and clinics.

"It reminds me of when I was doing my residency, I moonlighted a lot in rural emergency rooms around New Orleans and really enjoyed the people and doctors," he says of seeing patients in Davenport, Odessa and Ritzville. "It provides a service for the towns, and it's refreshing for me to get out of Spokane. I'd like to be out there more," he admits.

Lincoln Hospital Administrator Tom Martin says he would like to fulfill that wish. Tom says the hospital is working on expanding not only the clinical hours of Dr. Dunlap and Dr. Perry, but is considering extra equipment to support a more varied slate of surgical procedures.

And that suits, Dr. Dunlap just fine.

He says most surgical procedures can be done here, and he trusts the Lincoln Hospital staff implicitly for pre and post-op care. "The clinic and hospital staff are great to work with. They're friendly and provide excellent patient care. I have no reservations from the doctors all the way to the housekeeping crew."

And we're thrilled to help him build his practice here. Just give the man a saw.

