

John R. Mink Biography



John R. Mink - Class of 1946 - 1928 Dental Educator

LEXINGTON, Ky. (July 18, 2012) – The University of Kentucky College of Dentistry is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. As the UK medical community celebrates this milestone anniversary, they will also be celebrating the retirement and legacy of one of the founding faculty members, Dr. John R. Mink.

Mink came to UK in 1962 from Indiana University and was instrumental in recruiting the core faculty for the pediatric dentistry department. He walked in to his first classroom in the fall of 1962 and has taught every dental student that has graduated in the history of the college, all 3,227 of them.

Mink recalls the excitement he felt more than 50 years ago at the prospect of coming to UK to help create a new dental college and build a strong program in pediatric dentistry. As he prepares to retire, his passion for pediatric dentistry is still as strong today as it was in 1962.

“I love everything about my job,” Mink said. “I enjoy teaching and working with the students and patients.”

Mink has seen dramatic changes in dental medicine, most notably, the new materials used for restorative dentistry and new procedures. He has also witnessed considerable growth of the college. Classes in the early years consisted of about 18 to 20 students but as the college grew, expanded to nearly 60 students.

As the inaugural chair of the department of pediatric dentistry at UK, Mink succeeded in developing an excellent team that continues to rank among the best in the nation in academic standards and clinical service to the community. He stepped down as chair in 1974 to become associate dean of the dental college for the next 12 years.

In the 1980’s, when the Kentucky legislature was considering merging the dental schools at UK and the University of Louisville, Mink served as chair of pediatric dentistry at both colleges. The merger never happened, and Mink returned to UK to become section leader of pediatric dentistry in the Department of Oral Health practice until 1994. Since that time, he has continued to treat children at the Kentucky Clinic and at a specialty clinic in Garrard County.

“John was always willing to step in to help UK,” said Bob Spedding, retired faculty member in pediatric dentistry. “He was very well-known for his work with hospital dentistry and, in my opinion, few dentists in the world know as much as he does about cleft palate and anomalies or structural problems in the mouth and face of children.”

Charlotte Haney, Mink’s former student, graduated from dental hygiene school in 1973, dental school in 1976, and from the residency program in 1983. She is currently a professor and director of the postdoctoral program in pediatric dentistry at UK, and Mink’s colleague.

“He is an amazing man and will be impossible to replace,” Haney said. “The influence of John Mink will not end with his retirement. His philosophy of patient care will carry on in the thousands of dental students, pediatric dentistry residents, national and international dentists that he has influenced throughout the 50 years of his career.”

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Perhaps one of Mink's most notable achievements during his tenure at the UK College of Dentistry is the establishment of the mobile dental program. In the 1990's, he would drive a 40-foot van, fondly nicknamed by his colleagues the "Mink mobile". The dental clinic on wheels traveled to remote locations in Eastern Kentucky, providing oral health care to disadvantaged children. The program has since expanded to treat children in Western Kentucky as well. Today, the Mobile Dental Van program provides dental screening, treatment and prevention services to about 11,000 Kentucky children a year.

Mink smiles and laughs as he reminisces about his experiences and the people he has met, particularly the children he has treated, over the past half-century at the College of Dentistry. Patients who have heard about his retirement have made special trips in to the clinic just to give him a hug and to say goodbye.

"I'm going to miss it," he said. "Sometimes it is them that have tears in their eyes and sometimes it is me but if I were starting over today, I'd do the same thing."

Mink was scheduled to retire in June but he decided to put off retirement one month to make one last trip to Eastern Kentucky with the mobile dental van.

"I started the mobile dental program and I want that to be the last thing I do for the college."

The John R. Mink Endowed Chair in Pediatric Dentistry and Oral Health Services Research was established in 1999 to carry on Mink's commitment to improving the oral health of children, particularly in rural areas.

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