

Celebrating the Life, Laughter, and Leadership of Dr. Dale V. Hoekstra

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On behalf of his loving wife, Stephanie “Stevie” Hoekstra, and his family, I would like to celebrate the life of Dr. Dale Vandermeer Hoekstra. He was a husband, father, and colleague to some—but a dear friend to all. Almost 7 years ago, Dale adopted the University of New Mexico (UNM) Department of Orthopaedics & Rehabilitation into his own family. He passed away on November 3, 2014, and we will miss our family member dearly.

I first want to express my deep gratitude to each UNM Hospital nurse, staff member, physician, and surgeon who cared so lovingly for Dale during the 2 weeks before his passing. Stevie, myself, and all of us who knew and loved Dale are humbled by this selfless effort. Thank you to all of Dale’s wonderful caregivers.

Dale was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1945 and for many years called the Michigan area home. In 1963, he graduated from Highland Park High School and wanted to be a pilot, as well as have someone pay for his college education (the consummate businessman at 18 years of age). Subsequently, Dale applied and was accepted to the United States Air Force Academy. Health issues, however, lead Dale into the path of medicine—to which we are grateful!—and in 1971 he graduated from Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit. In San Antonio, Texas, Dale met his lovely Stevie and was married at the start of his residency program in 1973. He completed his residency training at William Beaumont Hospital, back in Detroit.

Dale became a pediatric orthopaedic and spine surgeon, performing a pediatric orthopaedic fellowship at the prestigious Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada. He grew interested in the academic side of medicine while directing the spinal deformities clinic at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit from 1980 to 1989. In 1989, this experience led to a membership in the Pediatric Orthopaedics Society of North America and the prestigious Scoliosis Research Society. Dale complimented his career with 20 years of private practice at Rochester Hills Orthopaedics in Rochester, Michigan. He was a leader throughout all components of

his career.

I first met Dale in the fall of 2007 and was instantly charmed by his great honesty, sense of humor, and experience as a leader in orthopaedic surgery. Dale joined us in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in December 2007 and was an instant fit. He loved this place, and although not having a Nordstroms, he was our man about town, showering us with his sense of humor, wit, and initiative. Dale’s handiwork is evident in the friendly environment of Carrie Tingley Hospital (where he was the medical director), UNM Hospital, and the UNM orthopaedics department. His love for our residents was a humbling sight—and, Stevie, we just loved to watch how you and Dale worked together to help recruit and build a community at UNM (all the while laughing because UNM rejected an expense listed as “arugula,” thinking it was alcohol and not a funny kind of lettuce).

For me, personally, Dale was a welcomed and trusted advisor and I gave him a lot of free rein as he grew into his position. Dale mentioned to me, on that dreaded last Friday, that he did not have a “good heart” . . . I must say, there is nothing further from the truth. He had the most wonderful heart. He refused to retire and loved his work at UNM. Every time we met, he said he was going to work for 3 more years. He just loved it here with us—with Stevie, staff members, nurses, faculty members, and especially resident surgeons.

I would now like to acknowledge everyone who came to the memorial, to everyone who shared experiences with and love for Dale. In memory of what Dale would have wanted (his cherished Thursday nights spent team building at restaurants scattered throughout Albuquerque), we had catered a very special meal to celebrate the life and mourn the loss of a most wonderful man, Dale Vandermeer Hoekstra.