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Retirement Farewell: Dr. Roger Hall

Cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Roger V. Hall is hanging up his scalpel on February 6 after a career that has spanned 40 years and more than 10,000 surgeries.



The widely respected surgeon played a key role in building Asante's Heart and Vascular Center, which is nationally recognized for excellence and patient outcomes. During his tenure he also endeared himself to his patients and colleagues.

"Dr. Roger Hall will always be one of my most trusted and respected colleagues," says cardiologist Brian Gross, MD, who came to the Rogue Valley around the same time as Dr. Hall in the early 1980s. "His incredible surgical expertise,

coupled with his gentle, sincere demeanor and unflappability in the face of a medical crisis improved or saved the lives of thousands of cardiac patients."

Longtime employees may recall that Dr. Hall first announced his retirement in late 2008. But staffing changes and demands of the still-growing Heart and Vascular Center prompted Asante's leadership and fellow surgeons to ask him to stay on a little longer.

Raised on a farm in Idaho, Dr. Hall never expected that he'd become a heart surgeon. He figured he'd be an engineer until, early in his studies, he envisioned a gray future sitting behind a bank of instruments and dials. He changed his focus to medicine.

He earned his medical degree from the University of Utah School of Medicine, served a general surgery internship and residency at Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, and completed a residency in cardiovascular and thoracic surgery at Letterman Army Medical Center in San Francisco. After his training, Dr. Hall spent seven years training residents at Army teaching hospitals.

He was recruited to the Rogue Valley by Roger Millar, MD, who needed skilled surgeons for a new heart program at what was then called Rogue Valley Medical Center. The physicians steadily helped build the program into a center of consequence.

"This hospital's mortar is filled with Roger's blood, sweat, and tears," says David Folsom, MD, a cardiac surgeon who practices with Dr. Hall. "A considerable part of the surgery program's accolades are due to his leadership."

Over the years Dr. Hall has witnessed countless advances in cardiovascular medicine. In the early days, he recalls, the standard treatment for blocked arteries was bypass surgery. "We basically used to sleep in the room next to the patient" in case of complications.

Today many patients avoid open heart surgery with angioplasty, and highly skilled cardiac nurses are able to provide clinical support. As a result of these advances, the surgeon's case mix is weighted with more complicated conditions and an older patient

population.

Dr. Hall relished those challenges, and they may be what he'll miss most about practicing medicine.

"This is an exciting place to be," he says. "In some cases, the work is dramatic – you can save a life."

In fact, years ago Dr. Hall may have saved the life of Dr. Gross' own father-in-law.

"Within hours of our first child being born," Dr. Gross recalls, "and the simultaneous arrival of my excited in-laws from Florida to 'help' school us in our new job as parents, it was obvious that my father-in-law had developed serious angina with minimal effort. I asked Roger to be his cardiac surgeon and, within hours, 'Grandpa' had five new bypasses. He went on to live another active, healthy 25 years without a single cardiac problem."

"For all of us cardiologists and other cardiac surgeons," Dr. Gross adds, "Roger has been a perennial voice of wisdom, sharing not just what could be done, but what should be done."

Nursing director Kristi Blackhurst, RN, describes Dr. Hall as a father figure to the surgical staff. "I am so grateful to know him, to have learned from him, and to have worked beside him. He will be forever missed, and we wish him many years of happiness, soaking up the love from his family and friends."

Dr. Hall's next chapter will play out on an 85-acre ranch that he and his wife own outside of Phoenix. He will continue to grow hay and raise the Angus cattle he bought a few years ago, and spend more time with his five children and 20 grandchildren. But he'll leave a little piece of his heart at Asante.

"I just absolutely loved my career in Medford, and the people I worked with -- the cardiologists, the surgeons, the hospital staff, the administration," he says. "It feels almost like God had his hands on me, putting me in the right place."