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The Insider's Guide to David Parke

David W. Parke II, MD, is retiring as Academy CEO at the end of this year. At the annual meeting in New Orleans, we'll celebrate his extraordinary leadership.

There will be many articles and letters about his achievements over the last decade. But, because a great leader is always an intriguing person, I wanted to investigate the characteristics that underpin his success. I talked to David's wife Julie, a pediatric neurologist, his son Will, a vitreoretinal surgeon, and his close friend Doug Koch, at the Cullen Eye Institute at Baylor College of Medicine.

David is a lifelong learner. The reading habit started in early childhood when he would read for hours in his room. To keep his two younger sisters from bothering him, the scientifically minded kid engineered a system that caused an electric shock when they touched the doorknob. Now, he reads several newspapers every morning and, most evenings, spends at least an hour reading a book.

A current photo of David reveals a confident, authoritative executive, but he didn't always present this way. When Julie met David in the cadaver lab on the first day of medical school, he had shoulder-length hair and strappy sandals. (I'm told this photo still circulates around the ophthalmosphere.) Julie and David got to know each other as dissection partners, and it quickly became clear that they were meant to be together. They've been married 46 years.

Doug and David met on the first day of internship and have been good friends ever since. As residents at Baylor, both were so highly motivated that they were appointed co-chief residents. The two made a great team. In addition to planning Grand Rounds and overseeing the ophthalmology residents, they worked together on their first Academy committee. And, Doug says, David's leadership potential was evident from the beginning: When there was a power outage at Baylor and no one knew what to do, David took charge.

David is serious in his public role, but those who know him well report that he is a lot of fun. While a resident, he wrote legendary faculty skits. Recently, he wrote an extensive Harry Potter trivia contest for his children and grandchildren. His friends from college at Stanford University still call him "Parn" after the legendary racecar driver Parnelli Jones. (Why? Well, as it happens, David had borrowed

his roommate's sports car and won a road rally race.)

Like many accomplished people, David has passionate interests. As a young man, he didn't just learn alpine climbing, he climbed the Matterhorn. After learning to dive, he explored underwater shipwrecks. When he got interested in fish and aquariums, he managed 15 saltwater tanks. He collects 16th- and 17th-century maps—but with a twist: He acquires those with interesting errors.

David once told Will that to run a medical organization, it was important to be a superb clinician and to be knowledgeable about other subspecialties. Will describes his dad as "steady, careful, and thoughtful—and a great vitreoretinal surgeon. He was always calm in the OR and never let anyone panic. He infused confidence into every person in the room." Will also felt that his dad was a strong presence in the home when he was a kid. "Dad was on call all through the '80s and '90s, but I never realized it." Doug describes a similar quality when he says that "David is always fully present." I asked Julie to describe a secret strength and she says, "He knows how to relax." He spends a lot of time alone thinking and often has new ideas after a concentrated time of contemplative activity, like fly fishing.

It's not surprising that a person with these characteristics became one of ophthalmology's leaders. Doug observes that David was never afraid to tackle a big problem and always wanted to have a significant impact in medicine. Julie also says that he "thinks several steps ahead of everyone else."

It was meaningful to me to hear David's wife, son, and longtime friend talk about David's talent and deeply held values. Underneath his polished and professional presence is an intense desire to do things well and to contribute to our profession and patients. Thank you, David Parke II.



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