

# EDITORIAL

## SO LONG, CUZ

### George Foster, O.D. Retires as Dean of NSU-OCO

*Upon occasion I will use my personal privilege to highlight someone who I believe has made a lasting impression upon optometry and behavioral optometry. This editorial is one of these times.*

Late in the afternoon of September 14, 2008, the participants of the Invitational Lens Symposium (ILS) gathered at the Holiday Inn Express in Tahlequah, OK. They were then conveyed to the home of Dean George Foster of the Northeastern State University-Oklahoma College of Optometry (NSU-OCO). This Sunday evening outing at the Foster's home has been a ritual since the ILS began meeting in Oklahoma and has become the highlight of the meeting.

The evening at the Foster's is a very casual affair. Participants sit on the deck of the Foster home on a cliff overlooking the Illinois River. Rita, George's lovely and gracious wife, plays the piano. The Fosters supply the barbecue and trimmings while the ILS supplies the drinks. It is a happy time of camaraderie and sharing of friendships. On this evening, however, there was some sadness when Dr. Foster announced that on December 3, 2008 the University would hold a retirement ceremony for him.

Dr. Foster retired in January, 2009. An era in the history of NSU-OCO has come to an end. Under George Foster's leadership, optometry education in Oklahoma flourished, health care for Native Americans improved, and indeed the world prospered from his leadership.

The December 3, 2008, event was less of a ceremony and more of a roast. The love and affection that the students, faculty, staff and university administration demonstrated for this man was clear. It

is therefore appropriate that a broader aspect of this profession should know of the accomplishments of one individual who has done so much for optometry.

George Foster, O.D., is gracious and never pretentious. He is circumspect, yet decisive. One only needs to read the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry Resolution (page 20) to understand his many contributions.

It was a pleasure to work with and for him for nine of his years at NSU-OCO. To say that George was completely knowledgeable in optometric education would be an overstatement. Indeed, most of his life was spent as a solo optometric practitioner. Yet, to underestimate his contributions to the profession, to Oklahoma and to optometric education would be a gross error. George's strength is in his compassion. Seldom do you meet anyone as dedicated. He has given his life to his family, his nation and the profession of optometry.

Behavioral optometry is also indebted to Dr. Foster. When Dr. John Streff first organized the ILS in Columbus, OH, it was devoted specifically to the exploration of how to use lenses, prisms, filters and light to influence human behavior. As hotel and travel costs increased, the meeting had become very expensive. As Dr. Streff was sharing these challenges with me, I suggested that we might hold the Symposium at NSU-OCO. I approached Dr. Foster and he generously offered the College as a meeting place. This meeting has convened at NSU-OCO yearly since that time.

George, a citizen of the Creek Nation, is the product of white and Native settlers to Oklahoma, two threads enjoined by his parents. His mother, Carolyn, was proud that some of her family came over on the Mayflower, and his father, Arthur, just as

proudly modified the Will Rogers quip to say that his people, the Creeks, had "met them at the boat." Arthur, whose family had resided in Indian Territory since the forced removals of the Creeks in the 1830s, met Carolyn, up from Texas, at Oklahoma State University (then Oklahoma A & M) – where George would meet his own wife, Rita.

When George was born, the youngest of three children, Arthur was serving in the Army Air Corps in San Antonio, TX. After the war, the Fosters returned to Bristow where Arthur succeeded his father, Tol, as president of the Community Bank in Bristow while Carolyn taught English in high school. His close family ties taught George to take an active interest in the community. The commitment to be involved in the community continues to be the hallmark of this clan.

He passed this legacy to his children, his faculty and his friends: that all aspects of

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*W.C. Maples, O.D.*

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the community are connected. George's favorite saying is, "We are all cousins." George always demonstrated a knack for dealing with others. In high school he was active in the Boy Scouts, basketball, golf, jazz band, Methodist Youth and served as the Student Council President.

He began college at Oklahoma State University where he met Rita Anderson. After three years of courtship, they married and transferred to Northeastern State University where George completed his undergraduate degree.

The family was blessed with four children: Kathleen, who took over George's Bristow practice; Calvin, a Naval Academy Alumni; Rhanda, tragically lost in an automobile accident in 1991; and Tol, a Ph.D. in Native American Literature. There are seven grandchildren.

After graduating from the University of Houston, College of Optometry, he entered optometric practice in Bristow where he worked (except for a two-year tour in the Air Force) until he was named interim dean of the NSU-OCO in 1997. During his private practice years, he was active in optometric politics at the state and national level. Space does not permit me to list all of his accomplishments. It suffices to quote the announcement of his retirement from the College.

*His long service to the profession of optometry included serving on the Oklahoma State Board of Examiners in Optometry...named the American Optometric Association's Optometrist of the Year in 1989.... named as a member of the Oklahoma Association of Optometric Physicians Team of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Optometric Management...one of the 10 ODs of the Decade.*

It goes on to say:

*Presenting himself as 'a poor ole country doc,' he inspired those around him with his knowledge, love, and tenacity to achieve only the best for the profession.*

George, the profession will miss you. Behavioral optometry will miss you. You supported the ILS and behavioral optometry. Moreover, you supported the people who you served all your professional life. Enjoy retirement old friend, but remember we often call out the old horses when a heavy load needs pulling. God speed, Cuz.



## RESOLUTION

George E. Foster, O.D.

**Whereas**, Dr. George E. Foster, Muskogee/Creek, has displayed an unyielding commitment and passion for Native Americans through a partnership with the Cherokee Nation to provide rural eye care in northeastern Oklahoma; and

**Whereas**, Dr. Foster has provided exceptional leadership in his eleven years as Dean of the Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry, as President from 2004 to 2005 of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry and from 1980 to 1981 of the Oklahoma Association of Optometric Physicians, and in numerous elected positions over his illustrious forty-year career; and,

**Whereas**, Dr. Foster's dedication to the expansion of optometry's service on the university's Broken Arrow Campus, is demonstrated through his successful efforts to secure the funding necessary to establish a Neurocognitive Rehabilitation and Low Vision Institute; and,

**Whereas**, Dr. Foster has advocated successfully on behalf of the optometry profession through the Oklahoma state legislature; and,

**Whereas**, Dr. Foster gives back to the profession of optometry, at both state and national levels, through volunteerism on numerous Boards, such as the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry, the Oklahoma Institute of Child Advocacy, the Oklahoma Academy of State Goals, and the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust; and,

**Whereas**, Dr. Foster, during nearly 30 years of private practice, enriched the community of Bristow, Oklahoma through service on the school board, chamber of commerce and his church, and,

**Whereas**, throughout his career, Dr. Foster has served as an exemplar for optometrists colleagues, optometry students and his patients, and,

**Whereas**, Dr. Foster's humility, wit and affability are appropriately represented by the following quote; "I came to NSU-OCO not knowing anything, without expecting to do anything, but I was smart enough to stay out of the way of the folks who knew and did everything. Gosh, I have done that all my life. Best wishes, cousin", and,

**Whereas**, Dr. Foster has been recognized for his leadership by being named "Optometrist of the Year" in 1989 by the American Optometric Association; now therefore be it

**Resolved**, that the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry extends special recognition to Dr. George E. Foster, whose professional career is a testament to why optometry is among the most desirable professions in the 21st century, and be it further

**Resolved**, that optometry, and humanity, have been bettered by Dr. Foster's leadership, advocacy, and volunteerism.