

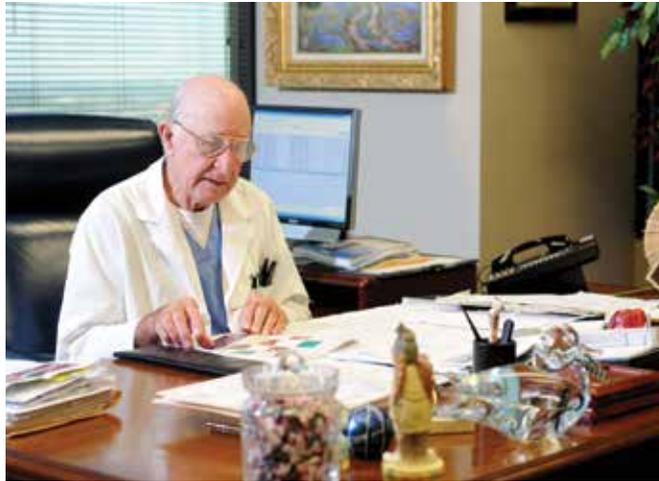


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ONE OF A KIND: JIMMY FRANK HOWELL, M.D.

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Jimmy Frank Howell, M.D.

It was a celebration to remember: October 5, 2012. The occasion honored Dr. Jimmy Frank Howell for his 50 years as one of the great cardiovascular surgeons in the Texas Medical Center.

Dr. Howell finished his medical education at Baylor College of Medicine at the top of his class and completed his surgical training under Michael E. DeBakey in 1962. He was then invited to join Dr. DeBakey in Baylor's Cardiovascular Surgical Department, where he remains today. He is the last of the original DeBakey group to remain actively practicing at The Methodist Hospital through all 50 years. He attributes to Dr. DeBakey and his then-associates, Drs. Stanley Crawford and George C. Morris, his consummate skill in peripheral vascular surgery for which he is widely known. He credits Dr. Denton Cooley, who was at that time an associate of Dr. DeBakey, with his equally consummate skill in cardiac surgery.

In the *Methodist DeBakey Cardiovascular Journal*, Volume 7, No. 1, we published a summary of Dr. Howell's first 40 years of surgery embracing more than 28,000 surgical procedures. From his very first day, the vital statistics most important to a surgeon, mortality and morbidity, were superior to any benchmark ever published. I have been privileged to work with him as one of his cardiology consultants for many of those years and intuitively knew those figures to be real. He has a uniquely given talent. His career did not take him on the lecture circuit, nor did he find time to write extensively. Rather, he has steadfastly sharpened his surgical skills by spending long hours in the operating suites.

At his celebration, several friends, colleagues, former residents, and students paid him homage. Dr. Denton Cooley was the first called upon by Dr. Robert Zurawin, the evening's master of ceremonies. Dr. Cooley quipped, "There was even then, as a young surgeon, a hint of a hidden talent to bloom so beautifully in the years to come." Others emphasized his honesty, integrity, and especially his compassion for his patients. In that regard, he emulated his role model, Dr. DeBakey, whose compassion for patients stood in sharp contrast to his strident demand for excellence from his students, residents, and colleagues.

Over the years, as his practice grew, Dr. Howell kept scrupulous records on all patients summarized in the largest Rolodex I've ever seen. His loyal longtime staff helped him keep everyone straight so at a moment's notice he could look up the details of any patient. Earlier this year, in recognition of his contributions to his patients and Baylor, he received a lifetime achievement award from the Baylor Alumni Association.

In the heyday of his practice, his hours in the operating room were long. His wife of many years, Roberta, was his rock, making sure he had something to eat for lunch and dinner and waiting patiently at night not knowing when he'd be home. They raised two sons and four daughters, all happily married, and now 13 grandchildren. Many of them live only a few miles away. They exemplify as fine a role model for all families as any I know despite his unforgiving hours of work. As these tributes were being extolled, Dr. Howell alternately grimaced, laughed, and shed tears surrounded by his family and friends. It was indeed an evening to remember.

My tribute read to him follows, being one of those privileged to speak on his behalf.