

April 2, 2008,
Jack Spears, TCMS Executive Director, 1941-1986
Tanya Luce, TCMS Associate Executive Director, 1962-2008.

JS = Jack Spears TL = Tanya Luce JG = Jerry Gustafson, MD interviewer

JG: First, who is Jack Spears?

JS: I'm from Arkansas, born in Fort Smith. My family moved to Fayetteville and I went to the University of Arkansas graduating in June 1941. I was interested in doing some kind of organizational work. Mr. Russell Rhodes, who was general manager of the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, often hired University of Arkansas graduates. Several were on his staff. He invited me for an interview and much to my surprise, he was sufficiently impressed. I don't know why because at that time, although I was about 22 years old, I looked like I was about 16. He said, "I don't have any openings on my staff now but they are looking for someone as the general manager of the Chamber of Commerce of Wagoner, Oklahoma." I went down to Wagoner and was interviewed and hired and became their general manager. I was also their only employee and I had an office which consisted of an old desk in the fire station in Wagoner. I worked there for just a few months and Mr. Rhodes called and said "there is a vacancy at the Tulsa Chamber in January". But he said, "I've been contacted by the Tulsa County Medical Society. They are looking for an Executive Director." He said, "I think this will be a good chance for you." I came to Tulsa in November, 1941, was interviewed by the Board of Directors and was hired and went to work the last week of December 1941.

At that time, Tulsa County Medical Society was in the Medical and Dental Arts building at Sixth and Boulder in downtown Tulsa. We were in what they called the attic. You would go up to the eleventh floor, then would walk up one more flight that they had remodeled and was originally an attic. We had, at that time, our own library and our own librarian and the society also operated a medical credit bureau, a collection agency. These offices were on twelve and that's where I started. I knew absolutely nothing about the medical profession but there was a great group of doctors.

Everything was downtown then. Springer Clinic was at Cincinnati and Sixth Street. Across the street the Court Arcade building had some doctors in it. Dr. A.B. Carney had a clinic called Tulsa Clinic at 915 South Cincinnati and there were some individual doctor offices in smaller towns like Broken Arrow and Skiatook.

JG: You and World War II began about the same time, what effect did the War have?

JS: I would say there were about 150 physicians and I believe about 40 of them went to serve in World War II. Of course that put a lot of pressure on those that remained and they worked long hours. At that time, of course, there were no insurance programs. There were still a lot of people who did not come to doctors. Physicians in a regular stream were called to service or volunteered and for those years I was working for a group of older physicians who did not generally qualify for military service.

JS An interesting thing about the medical society was their main emphasis was on scientific programs. Meetings were held the second and fourth Mondays of each month. On the second Monday there would be a visiting guest speaker. We got some very well respected physicians who came to town to speak to our organization. Then, on the fourth Monday, a local physician would make a presentation. We met at the Mayo Hotel. The Mayo at that time did not even have

a microphone in its meeting rooms. The society had a big old portable sound system and I had to put that thing on a dolly and take it over to the Mayo then come back and get one or two projectors. So it took an effort to get the programs set up.

I had the opportunity to meet some of the best known physicians in the United States and elsewhere. Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin, came and talked to the Tulsa County Medical Society. It was part of the development of the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. He was here twice. One visit, I took a picture of him with six or seven other doctors who met him at the airport. Following the war, travelers couldn't bring much money out of England. He wasn't pleased with the tie he had brought, thus I took him downtown to a shop and bought him a necktie.

I knew Dr. Michael DeBakey very well. There was a famous physician who was scheduled to speak to a TCMS meeting in my early days. The speaker called the day of the meeting and said he couldn't come but he was sending one of his associates. Our president came in and said that the speaker was sending a replacement who was probably a resident. The president was very upset and couldn't even decide whether to meet the replacement at the airport. I said "well, I'll go out to the airport and meet him." I asked what his name was and he wrote it down for me. It was Michael DeBakey. I went out and picked up DeBakey and he knocked them dead with his talk. He came back to Tulsa several times and always remembered me. I was up in the Drake hotel in Chicago once and a voice in my ear said, "Hello Jack, still working for the damn doctors?" It was Michael DeBakey.

JG: What do you recall about Polio?

JS: In the 50's and 60's, Polio made terrible inroads on the children particularly. It was the saddest thing to go in there and look at those poor children. In the mid 1950's, Salk vaccine immunization by injection was approved. In 1963, the oral Sabin vaccine was released. Tulsa County Medical Society was one of the leaders in a mass immunization project in 1963. There were three sessions held in this community-wide immunization and I believe they were six weeks apart. My recollection is that we had about 70 different sites, usually in schools, and people would line up to get the sugar cube with the liquid vaccine on it. They were asked to give 25 cents toward the cost, if they had it.

To get the project started, Tulsa County Medical Society had to buy \$100,000 worth of the vaccine on credit. Well, that was probably equivalent to about a million dollars today. Most people paid their 25 cents and some people dropped in a \$50 bill and some people left dollars. The proceeds paid for the vaccine and bought some more vaccine later and we finally wound up with \$104,000 surplus. We took half that money and started the scholarship fund of the medical society. The other half was given to various charities and various groups that helped us. Our co-sponsor was Tulsa City-County Health Department, who supported us with personnel.

Dr. Bob Endres was in charge of the TCMS involvement. We had to have every doctor in the medical society participate. Dr. Endres said "we are not going to ask for volunteers we are going to tell them that they are assigned to a site" and you know I think every doctor assigned showed up unless he was sick or had a medical emergency. As a result, I think we only had three or four no-shows. Everybody else turned out and most of them enjoyed it and had a good time and visited with the people. It was a real community project and my understanding is that there was not a case of polio in Tulsa after that took place.

JG: Tanya you arrived just in time for this marvelous public health effort, tell us something about yourself.

TL: I was born in Tulsa and graduated from Edison High School. I started with TCMS in July 1962. I was hired to work with Zelma Fink and collect delinquent accounts for the medical credit bureau which was owned and operated by the medical society. My graduate education was with Mr. Spears. He helped me perfect my clerical skills and everything else.

JG: Tell us about the changes of the late 60's and early 70's.

TL: The TCMS library was moved to Hillcrest and eventually donated to the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine-Tulsa. They took the whole thing. It was a great gift. I don't know how many thousands and thousands of bound volumes were included.

JS: The OU medical school had its beginnings with TCMS. We had a committee that worked for about seven years to bring this about including C. S. Lewis, C.T. Thompson, Jed Goldberg, Wendell Smith, and many others. Tulsa County Medical Society put up most of the money for a feasibility study. It seems like small money now; I think we invested about \$18,000, that's about the equivalent of \$180,000 now. The study recommended the creation of the Tulsa Medical Education Foundation. Two or three years later, we entered the second phase by obtaining support from the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, OSMA and other groups. The OSMA was largely responsible for lobbying the legislature for approval. However, remember the medical school began with the Tulsa County Medical Society."

JG: Now we are entering the decade of the 80's, what is remembered?

JS: One thing I think is interesting about the 80's was the collapse on restrictions on doctors advertising. About the time I retired in 1986, it seems that's about the time the gates opened and it became accepted. Earlier, if a physician got the slightest bit of publicity there was hell to pay. When I first came here doctors were paged by a number, a call number, and you would be assigned a number like 201, so in a public setting if they wanted to page a doctor they would say "there is a call for doctor 201." Of course, about six doctors who couldn't remember their number would call to see if that was for them. They were having a football game at TU one Saturday and the announcer was the sports editor at the Tulsa World. He announced the game over the loudspeaker. He announced that there was a call for Dr. John Jones; I don't remember who it was. At the medical society meeting the following Monday someone said "Dr. John Jones is advertising. He got them to announce his name over the loudspeaker." He said, "I move that we instruct Mr. Spears to call the sports editor of the Tulsa World and tell him he is to use those numbers."

Well, I called him and gave him the message that he was to use the numbers and after he made some pointed remarks about the asininity of the system and my canine ancestry he told me what I could do the list of numbers. That was dropped of course when the early cell phones came into use.

JS: We were always in need of a building. As early as 1945, Homer Ruprecht tried to get going with a building project, but we didn't get anywhere with that. Later Dr. George Russell, who was president at that time, got the society interested in buying its own building and managed to get an assessment of each member to start a fund to buy the building. They were assessed \$20 or \$25, I have forgotten which. We had one member, and I'm not going to tell you who it was, was absolutely so opposed that at every meeting he would bring up the subject, saying "we have no

business owning our own building,” and one evening, the society got tired of listening to this guy and they voted to refund the money to everyone who had contributed and that’s what happened. That collapsed our building program. I couldn’t believe that took place but it did.

TL: Jack retired in 1986 and Paul Patton became the Executive Director. We were in the Utica Square Medical Building and suffered from a major flood from a dental office above our offices. Everything was posted in large journals by hand and these were some of the things that were lost in the flood. Most of the important information in doctor’s files was maintained. We moved into the newly remodeled former doctors building at 21st and Lewis where the Society had their first meeting room. One of the most exciting things we did early on was one hot, August day was to clean out the storage unit. We carried the mimeograph machine on which Jack printed the newsletter and did most of the printing including meeting notices to the dumpster at Utica Square. We were using IBM Selectric typewriters and then came the big box word processors. I think it was the first time the medical society had word processors. We had finally entered into some type of electronic age.

TL: The doctors and Jack have talked about building a building for many years. It was a dream come true for me to be involved in that. I think without the leadership of some of our board members and Dr. Wally Hooser, who got us started again with a nice donation and matching grant from his foundation, it would have been very difficult. The entire board got behind it. The membership stepped forward and from 2002 when we moved into the building to December 2007, the building was completely paid off. It was an amazing experience and something I think physicians in Tulsa will be proud of for a long time.

TL: I think the rise of the three letter words (HMO, PPO, and DRG) and others changed the face of the medical community. I think the competition and contracts split the medical community and damaged the Tulsa County Medical Society. There was no major cohesive group after managed care.”

JS: The attraction of the HMO is that doctors are getting out of medical school with enormous debts from medical school and they could join without having to put tens of thousands of dollars into opening a private office and doing management. I’m sure that is a great attraction to the HMO’s and the groups to join them on that basis.

TL: I so much enjoyed working with Jack. He was a teacher and mentor and helped me along the path. When I started working, I collected deadbeat, delinquent accounts for doctors and that was interesting and then we went into the credentialing business and we closed that down and built a building and the drug recycling program that we were involved in with Dr. Prothro and you (Dr. Gustafson) have been the most rewarding thing in the later years. That program that started here has saved millions of dollars and the efforts through the legislature to get that started.

JG: Tanya Luce retired in 2008. Jack and Tanya provided a combined 91 years of work for the Tulsa County Medical Society.