

Bowser 'family tradition'

Eight dentists span four generations in the profession

By Jennifer Garvin

York, Pa—For the four generations of dentists in the Bowser family, the profession goes much deeper than earning a living: it's about enjoying what you do, giving back and honoring a memory.

Their story began when Dr. Edward Bowser Sr. opened his first dental practice—in his parents' living room—in 1924. According to family legend, he almost didn't graduate—not because of his dental skills, but because he didn't know how to swim. Back then many dentists had to pass a swimming test and Ed Sr. spent an entire summer taking swimming lessons. He later built a swimming pool to ensure his children knew how to swim but he surely didn't foresee the next three generations of Bowsers following in his professional footsteps.

"We have a family tradition in dentistry that the family is very proud of," said his son, Dr. Michael "Mike" Bowser Sr., an oral surgeon.

When he was in high school, Mike Sr., now 79, recalled his father's suggestion that he pursue a career in biology but he insisted on doing "the dental thing" because he remembered what a good life his father was able to provide for him and his siblings. Mike Sr. was a captain who fought in the Korean War and he used

his skills as a pilot to cover trauma and other oral surgical cases before retiring. Later, Ed Jr.'s son, Carl, and Mike's son, Mike Jr., entered the profession. In all, there have been eight dental Bowsers.

Mike Jr.'s road to dentistry was the most circuitous. He started off studying wildlife management with a concentration in biology, and by the time he was 24, was a professional airline pilot and captain of a commuter airline. However, he didn't see a lot of opportunity for advancement and eventually applied to the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine.

"It was a very proud day for my grandfather the day I graduated," said Mike Jr., 57. "The dean handed my diploma to my father, my father handed it to my grandfather and my grandfather handed my diploma to me! Three successive generations in dentistry and all Penn grads."

Ed Jr., 81, practiced 35 years before retiring. He marvels at the technological advances available and said he'd love to be practicing today.

"Everything is digital," he said. "It's unbelievable. I'd have a ball."

Ed Jr.'s son, Carl, said he never felt pressure to become a dentist and that he felt his dad took special care not to push him into the profession.

"It wasn't until my junior year [in college] that I knew I wanted to be a dentist," Carl said. "Before that, I'd never spent any time in the practice."

Today, that practice includes patients who first saw a Bowser dentist with Ed Sr. Over the years, all of the Bowser spouses have also been involved in the practice, and Carl's son, Dr. Brian Bowser, 26, now practices with his dad.

Son Robert, 24, is a second-year dental student at Temple.

Robert briefly considered being a chemist, but a summer spent assisting at his dad's office convinced him dentistry was where he wanted to be.

"Within a few days of working," he said, "I realized there was something a dentist had that a chemist couldn't get. My dad's patients trusted him and revered him. I saw that my dad had a few thousand people in the community trusting in him and making important decisions about their health care based on what he said. It's that kind of relationship with the patients that brought me into the dental field."

Brian studied physics and considered engineering but said dentistry was always there in the back of his head. His father's passion for the job inspired him.

"One time when I was in a what-am-I-going-to-do-with-the-rest-of-my-life funk, I asked Dad how much he truly liked his job. He bluntly stated that he never once got to the back door of the office and didn't want to go in.

"From that point on, I wanted to find a profession I could be just as passionate about, and since dentistry had been so good for Dad, it was naturally at the top of my list."

Brian and Carl have now been practicing together for nine months. Carl said he takes a lot of pride in both of his sons turning to dentistry. Robert graduates in 2010 and will likely join the family practice.

"The fact that they decided on their own makes it even sweeter," said Carl, adding that he is learning a lot from Brian. "His enthusiasm is a boost."

Ed Jr.'s other son, John, became a physicist instead of a dentist but his son, Dan, 24, will soon become the family's second oral surgeon. Dan is presently an oral surgery resident at Case Western University in Cleveland. Being his own boss was part of the lure of the profession, Dan said, as well as the flexibility and freedom of allowing a dentist to provide more personalized treatment.

"It's hard to get bored with a career where you utilize science, managerial, clinical and psychological skills on a daily basis," said Dan. "There is always room for personal growth and improvement on some aspect of practice, especially as the technology we use is going through a period of rapid advancements. To me that's exciting."

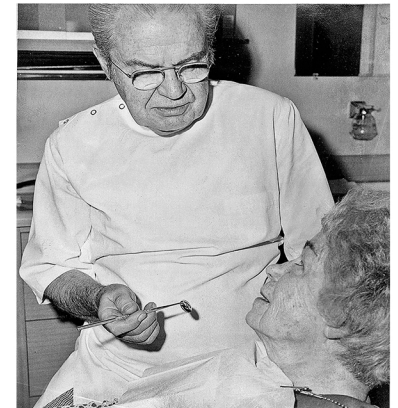
Robert shares a birthday with Ed Sr., who was born in 1902 and died in 1990.

"I think he'd get a kick out of seeing what a long line of dentists he began," Robert said.

His grandfather agrees.

"I look at these kids and I have a great sense of pride," Ed Jr. said, "They're all doing well and they're all enjoying it."

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Old School: Dr. Edward Bowser Sr., examines a patient during the 1970s.

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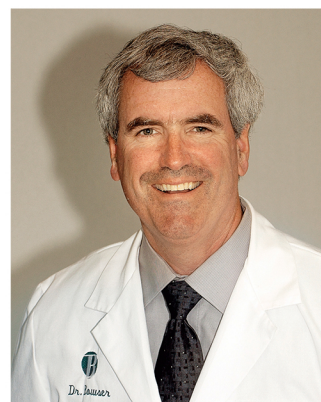
Dr. Edward Bowser Jr.



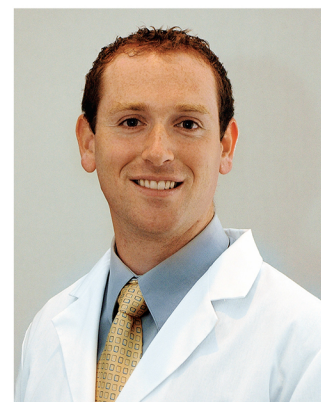
Dr. Michael Bowser Sr.



Dr. Michael Bowser Jr.



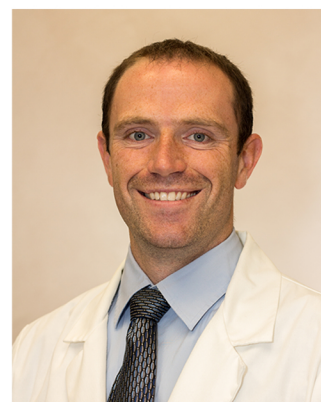
Dr. Carl Bowser



Dr. Brian Bowser



Dr. Dan Bowser



Robert Bowser