

Address by Chair-elect of the ADEA Board of Directors

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This address by the 2018-19 Chair-elect of the ADEA Board of Directors was presented to the ADEA House of Delegates at the 96th ADEA Annual Session & Exhibition in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Gremillion is Dean of the Louisiana State University Health New Orleans School of Dentistry.

Good afternoon. Thank you all for the tremendous honor, privilege, and opportunity to serve you and ADEA as Chair of the Board beginning next week.

This is a landmark time in the history of the organization. It is with great respect and admiration that we thank those who have led the Association from its inception to the present. The vision and tireless efforts of Dr. Rick Valachovic have been the jet fuel that has propelled the organization for the past 22 years, from a small entity forging a path and refining a purpose to an organization with 20,000 members and a global presence that truly has become The Voice of Dental Education. I have been impressed and inspired by the leadership provided by Dr. Monty MacNeil, our current Chair, who is presiding over the 2019 Annual Session & Exhibition, “Celebrating Our Collaborative Spirit,” and by the ADEA Board of Directors for their dedication and thoughtful guidance on and deliberations of critical issues facing dental education. Of course, we owe a great debt of gratitude to the entire ADEA staff, one that has grown tremendously over the past decade and greatly expanded the talents, skills, services, and productivity of ADEA. And to you, the membership, for your “boots on the ground” dedicated efforts and input that have brought the oral health team to the forefront in the education, research, service, and clinical care arenas. Together we have and will continue to strive to further the vision of ADEA as we lead and support the health professions community in preparing future-ready professionals and improving population health.

It is customary for the Chair-elect to share a bit of the story about the pathway that led him or her to this point in time. As I am sure you would agree, talking about yourself is something that is not

necessarily easy or comfortable, especially in such a “small, intimate” gathering as this one. I would say that if I had to sum up the journey that my life has been in one word, it would be “blessed.”



At age seven months, I was adopted from an orphanage in north Louisiana and raised with my adopted sister in a small Louisiana farming community, Cottonport, with a population of 2,000 people, most of whom were related. Cottonport is located in the middle of the state; however, you would have to be lost to get there. We had two red lights, of which only one ever worked. My high school graduating class was composed of 45 students.

I will always remember when I was a junior in high school talking to my uncle, a successful pharmacist whom I greatly admired, about my desire to follow in his footsteps. In 1967, he shared with me that while pharmacy had been a great profession for him, he envisioned that the environment would change, and small pharmacies would be replaced by corporate-owned enterprises and, therefore, I should consider dentistry. He suggested I spend time in the dentist’s office located in his building. That was a major redirection of my pathway toward pursuit of a career in dentistry. Upon graduation from the Louisiana State University School of Dentistry in 1977, I returned to Cottonport, where I maintained a general practice for 12 years, quickly becoming deeply embedded in the activities of the community. This resulted in a widening of my pathway, to include running for public office, which drove my desire to implement community fluoridation and move forward with reapportionment to address disparity in representation.

During my time in private practice, I gained great perspectives from caring for the poor, children from the Head Start program, the Tunica-Biloxi

Indian Tribe, and nursing home patients, in addition to my other patients. I also became a continuing education junkie, recognizing very quickly that dental school provided only a base for lifelong education, on which it was my responsibility to build.

As a result, my pathway was soon to be redirected, or better stated, refined, and it changed my life forever. While studying and teaching at the L.D. Pankey Institute, I met my mentors, Drs. Parker Mahan and Peter Dawson. That interaction and exposure ignited my desire to enter a postgraduate program at the University of Florida, which I thought would be a stepping stone to a return to private practice back home in Louisiana. I couldn't have been more wrong, as it provided for my pathway into academics almost 30 years ago. What a blessing that has been.

We have all heard the term "the circle of life." Yes, sometimes our pathway is circular, and I have experienced two of the most special examples of this phenomenon. The first was the tremendous opportunity to return to my dental alma mater, LSU Health Sciences Center School of Dentistry, in October 2008 to serve as dean. The chance to come back home and be part of a very special family of faculty, staff, and students, as well as a wonderfully vibrant community, has been an experience I will always cherish and feel most blessed for the opportunity.

The second was most unexpected and tremendously impactful. On a beautiful October Sunday afternoon in 2017, while working on a lecture for my anatomy class the next day, I received an email through Ancestry.com that simply said "first cousin," and in reading between the lines, I found it said, "Who are you and where did you come from?" It was clear this was not a hoax. It was another blessing, but not in disguise—a connection with my birth family, which at age 66 I had never met. This is a special blessing and has been unbelievably life-changing and truly completes the circle.

Without doubt, the most significant pathway I have followed was related to meeting my wife, Mackey, while we were students at LSU. She has been my best friend, confidant, cheerleader, and coach. She has always tried to keep me on the right path. She is the most unselfish person I have ever met. She has been an inspiration as mother of our four children and grandmother to our nine grandchildren. Thank you, Mac, I love you.

The upcoming year will be most exciting. It will herald the initiation of implementation of the newly developed ADEA strategic framework. That framework is based on our mission to lead

and support the health professions community in preparing future-ready oral health professionals by advancing excellence, driving innovation, and building institutional resilience in academic dentistry and beyond.

It is ironic that the finalization of the new strategic framework coincides with Dr. Valachovic's retirement. In truth, it is the ideal time for unveiling and actualizing the goals, objectives, and strategies associated with this framework. This will support a primary focus of the upcoming year, which will be to facilitate the transition as the torch is passed from Dr. Valachovic to the new ADEA President and CEO, Dr. Karen West.

As this new framework is put into action, it is important we maintain a continuum of effort, recognizing that our core initiatives, an evolving process established about six years ago, provide a scaffolding of continuity. The current core initiatives will continue to be fostered and refined. Addressing the growing student debt, nurturing students as future faculty, redefining the oral health care team's role in primary health care, and modernizing pathways to licensure are critical and must continue. However, it is of utmost importance that we recognize the rapidly changing environment, identify and address challenges, and proactively pursue areas of greatest opportunity. As new initiatives are developed and evolve to maturity, they will serve as a scaffolding for empowerment and engagement of the entire ADEA family. It is critical to the future of the organization, and in the true spirit of team, that all councils are vested in the process.

Historically, one of the greatest qualities of ADEA has been our ability to not only adapt to change, but to guide it in a strategic and visionary manner, recognizing that change is not an option but an imperative that, if ignored, would lead to stagnation and complacency. The choice to commit to strategic change for the betterment of education of the oral health care team and beyond is the premise on which our future successes will be based.

This is an exciting time for the oral health professions education and health care team. At the same time, there have been significant cultural and climate shifts, including:

- Demographic changes in our patient, student, and faculty populations.
- The composition of the primary health care team, with the oral health team taking our rightful place at the table.
- Political consternation and uncertainty.

- Disruptive technologies and teaching methods.
- Globalization of dental education.

As an organization, we must remain nimble and have our fingers on the pulse, as these cultural and climate shifts require quick and thorough analysis and strategic response. One glaring example is the opioid crisis, which has taken on a life of its own. We must continue to further dialogue on how to strengthen the connections between health professions education and practice in addressing this difficult issue.

In the area of resilience and well-being, it is important to further explore the mental health challenges faced by those working and learning in the health professions. It is incumbent on us to determine how stress, burnout, and other factors are impacting well-being in our institutions.

It is of utmost importance that we further efforts to expand diversity and inclusiveness. We must also continue to support ADEA's leadership role in inter- and intraprofessional education and collaborative care and prepare graduates for success as integral members of the collaborative health care team, with a focus on value-based, patient-centered care.

Have any of you ever felt that your pathway to your future career has become uncertain, cloudy, or in need of guidance or redirection—a need for somewhat of an academic GPS for plotting your career pathway?

During my interaction with the councils at last year's Annual Session and review of comments from the individuals surveyed during the search for the next ADEA President and CEO, it became abundantly clear that our focus must be on providing pathways for career development that are broad in scope. In today's world of new technology, changing pedagogy, fluctuating budgets, and expanded scientific knowledge, and as we focus on preparing our graduates to be future-ready, it would be reasonable to ask ourselves if our own careers are future-ready. Today's dental educator must acquire a nuanced understanding of rapidly changing organizational structures and principles of inclusion. Each of us can facilitate the evolution of institutional cultures to foster individual well-being and resilience, elevate advocacy on behalf of the oral health team, further academic and administrative advancement among faculty and staff, and promote stewardship and fundraising skills among active and emergent leaders.

This is the basis on which the theme for next year's annual session, "Discover Your Pathway," was developed. The 2020 ADEA Annual Session & Exhibition in National Harbor, Maryland, will be a conference that supports ADEA members' professional growth through personalized learning that will be applicable across the academic life cycle.

I hope that you will be there—and bring friends!