

Dr. Mitch Baldree's Presidential Address to the TDA House of Delegates May 13, 2023

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Cohlma, Dr. Medovic, distinguished guests, colleagues, and friends, welcome to the 156th Annual Session of the Tennessee Dental Association House of Delegates. I am privileged to be speaking to you as my final act as President of this proud association and I would like to present a few highlights of this past year's activities.

Last July, the TDA Board of Trustees met with the aid of the ADA to develop a new strategic plan with goals to guide us into the future. Our new mission is: "We help dentists succeed and support the advancement of the health of the public." We established a 2023-2025 Strategic Plan called "Driving Dentistry Forward." Its three key goals are to:

- 1- Ensure an engaged and inclusive MEMBERSHIP environment by providing relevant member value
- 2- Ensure financial and ORGANIZATIONAL STABILITY to serve our members
- 3- Be the leading voice for ORAL HEALTH in Tennessee

I'd like to speak to each of these three goals.

In terms of financial and organizational stability, we are in excellent hands. We have a great board. Good job on selecting leaders from your components who really want to serve and are committed to our profession. We've had a great year of in-person meetings, thanks to being on the other side of the COVID pandemic. I can't say enough about our amazingly effective executive director, Andrea Hayes. She has assembled a gifted team that runs like a well-oiled machine. Grace Czosek manages Membership Services, Langley Clements handles Events & Education, Sara Moorehead oversees Marketing, Carson Herbert coordinates Communications, Lisa Johnson assists with Administration, and last but not least, Amy Williams, as Director of Operations, is the glue that holds it all together. Our staff are truly here for you, so make sure you put the TDA's phone number in your iPhone contacts!

Andrea truly gets the big picture and challenged me, at least, to evaluate the benefits of every cost in our budget. Financially, our sponsorship income has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. But thanks to the vision of our leadership over 20 years ago who had the foresight to build our Headquarters in the middle of an empty field, we are now five months from paying off the mortgage on our building. We had significant maintenance expenses in the form of a new HVAC system this year, and had a few hiccups regarding tenants, but two floors of rental income should become a nice stream of non-dues revenue in the years to come. Membership dues remain steady, but our financial and organizational strength will really come from doing a good job recruiting and retaining our members.

At the end our dues renewal, we stand at 1987 members. This represents a 64.6% market share, statewide. Our number of Retired Life dentists is growing, while our Actives are declining. But for years now we have been losing ground with new and early career dentists, which does not bode well for the future. Grace & Andrea signed on 66 new members from the graduating classes at UT & Meharry this past month. These fresh dentists will get free service for 2 years before full dues kick in, so it's really incumbent on our component societies to engage these new members locally right off the bat. The reality is that our new members are significantly more diverse, and we've got to remove any perceived barriers to their participation. We have to intentionally include them in leadership roles not only to engage them but to have their perspectives in guiding our decisions. When we built our headquarters 20 years ago, most of our members were, like I was, 40-something white males in solo practice. In the next 5 years, these Baby Boomers will shrink from currently 30% of our membership to 16%, Millennials will grow to 44%, and Gen Zs to 11%—assuming we can keep them involved. Gen Z dentists are over 50% female and nearly 50% racially diverse. I'm a Boomer, but I parent a Millennial and a Gen Z, so we need to learn to think like our kids if we want to remain a viable organization for the generations to come.

The best way to recruit & retain members, of course, is by providing great value to our members. Professional development in terms of CE and connections with colleagues and even vendors are what our members typically associate with organized dentistry. Our component organizations do this well, and it's a big part of what the TDA invests heavily in every year. We struggled with this during the pandemic and had to rely heavily on online CE, but there's just no substitute for in-person learning and connecting. We've just wrapped up what is our truly first post-pandemic annual meeting, with 760 dentists, staff, and exhibitors in attendance. Dr. J Newman did a fantastic job chairing the Annual Session Committee, with able assistance of the aforementioned TDA staff and Dr. Chad Edwards, Chair of the CE Subcommittee, Dr. Anthony Carroccia, Chair of the Events, Registration, & Marketing Subcommittee, and Dr. Beth Randall, Chair of the Exhibitors and Fundraising Subcommittee. Since we were competing with Mother's Day and graduations, and COVID was still in play as we planned, it was challenging to work everything we wanted into a tight timeline. Add in cost containment and space constraints, and it's clear that this talented group of folks performed magic in the Music City. We are setting the stage for this to become a regional meeting that attracts nonmembers dentists and those outside our state to enjoy great CE in a nationally recognized tourist destination.

One of our best member benefits, in my opinion, is advocacy, not only to protect our members from governmental overreach, but also to advocate for the oral health of all Tennesseans. A large portion of our budget is spent on lobbying, and this has really paid off. Tennessee is one of the first states to pass the Dentist/Hygienist Interstate Licensure Compact. Once a significant number of states join, this will allow greater flexibility for dentists and hygienists to practice across state lines.

TennCare added an adult dental benefit this year, and the TDA is advocating for improvements to the TennCare system and reimbursements in order to foster an adequate network of dentists in the program. Additionally, the TN Department of Health has funded a \$12M pilot project

aimed at addressing unmet dental needs which includes increasing dental school enrollment and recruiting dentists to practice in rural and underserved areas.

On the legislative front, there is a lot of energy nationwide for dental insurance reform. Last November, Massachusetts opened the door for this with a ballot initiative establishing dental loss ratios that basically limit the profits insurance companies can take and encourage them to pay out more benefits per premium dollar. The TDA polled our membership to verify that they strongly support moving forward with a state legislative initiative for dental insurance reform. While this will be a serious multi-year initiative, we have already secured sponsors for legislation in both the House and the Senate as well as an ADA grant to expand our lobbying team. We are also in productive discussions with the Department of Commerce and Insurance to voice Tennessee dentists' and our patients' perspectives.

In the realm of promoting oral health, I'd like to mention that the Tennessee Dental Association Foundation (for which we raised \$5,600 at our silent auction last night), developed its first-ever strategic plan this March. The TDAF continues to focus its efforts on building an endowment to advance dental education and research. It's been my distinct pleasure to have served on this committee for the past 7 years, and I know how hard Dr. Steve Sawrie, Dr. Robert Hopper, and Dr. Bill Powell have worked on this through the years. I encourage each of you to not only make an annual contribution to this worthy fund, but to also consider a planned gift.

A few challenges that I see on the horizon: I continue to bring up our shortage of skilled workers in our offices: hygiene, assisting, and administrative. I know that the ADA is making strides in this direction, but I'd like to see the TDA take a more proactive role in advocating for dentists in the development of an adequate workforce.

This year, we have been fortunate to have two excellent candidates for TDA President-Elect. Previously, our internal rotations often disadvantaged smaller districts, with some only having the opportunity to provide a candidate once every 32 years. By balancing the number of members in each region of our four-year rotation, we have ensured that every district in the state now has the chance to field a candidate for President-Elect every four years. I believe that the fact we had two strong candidates is a healthy sign of our organization's process and progress. Healthy competition is a good thing, and this simplified rotation makes our leadership selection process more open and transparent, which is especially important to our younger members.

Lastly, and I don't want you to boot me out of the room for saying this, but it is time to acknowledge that the House of Delegates takes up a large amount of time and resources for the benefits it brings. A House of Delegates made sense 156 years ago but seems a bit dated in the current technology age. COVID especially taught us that conditions can change suddenly, and we need to be able to respond rapidly and move nimbly when issues arise. And I hope that this body is open to change if we want to move forward into a successful future.

Those of us in this room understand that we are stronger together, and the greater our market share, the stronger our voice. The better we meet our member's needs and concerns, the stronger our market share will be. I've been honored to play a minor role in the long history of this fine organization and look forward to watching its future unfold.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and recognize my wife, Dr. Marie Farrar, for her efforts and counsel helped guide me in my presidency and continues to do so with our blessed life together.

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