

Thomas H. Cromwell, M.D., 2004 CSA Distinguished Service Award

By Thomas W. Feeley, M.D., CSA Past President

This year the CSA grants its highest honor by giving the Distinguished Service Award to Thomas H. Cromwell, M.D. As someone who worked closely with Tom for more years than either of us would like to admit, it is a great honor to be asked to write a few words about him. Tom was always one step ahead of me in his professional career. I have therefore always looked up to him as one of our most dedicated leaders. The highlights of his leadership career are his service to the CSA on our Board of Directors, as our President and as our District Director to the ASA. He has also led the ASA by serving on the Board of Directors and the Administrative Council as ASA Secretary.

Tom has served the CSA in many other capacities and is truly deserving of this award. His work on our groundbreaking Peer Review Committee led the ASA to developing similar services. He took a leadership role in bringing the issue of economic credentialing to the forefront of organized medicine. His leadership in governmental affairs was well known, and it was his active courting of the controversial Representative Pete Stark that led the ASA in a number of its battles with the Medicare program in the 1990s. Behind the scenes at the CSA he helped reorganize the CSA office in the 1990s, making it the great organization it is today.

Please remember that Tom is, like many great anesthesiologists, a native of Iowa and its educational system. He attended the University of Iowa both as an undergraduate and as a medical student. He also followed the path of other great anesthesiologists from Iowa by going to the University of California at San Francisco where he was a resident from 1969-1971, and he subsequently conducted anesthesia research there. He served in the United States Navy for two years returning to the UCSF faculty for five years from 1973-1978. That is where we first worked together. From then on he has been in private practice at the California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco where he served as Department Chair from 1986-2000. Most importantly, and sometimes forgotten when we discuss leaders, Tom is perhaps best known for what he does every day—he is an outstanding clinical anesthesiologist.

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In addition to serving on the CSA Board of Directors and as CSA President in 1990, Tom chaired nine different CSA committees. At the ASA, in addition to his service on the Board of Directors as our District Director and on the Administrative Council for a period spanning ten years, he chaired eight ASA committees and sections and participated as a member on an additional ten. Tom has also served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Guedel Anesthesia Society, as a reviewer for the California Medical Board, and as a member of a number of planning groups and committees for the California Medical Association and the San Francisco Medical Society. Finally, Tom has been an active member of his community of Belvedere, California, including serving as Fire Commissioner.

Tom is truly deserving of the California Society of Anesthesiologist’s Distinguished Service Award. Congratulations, Tom!

Commentary on a Distinguished Friend

By Steven D. Goldfien, M.D., CSA Past President

As I write these words, Tom Cromwell is packing his bags for his upcoming trip to Iraq. He will be one of thirty American physicians who, together with the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi physician community, will begin the process of resurrecting the Iraqi health care system. Although this undertaking may well be risky, it is required by the Geneva Convention, and those making the trip are rendering an important service to the Iraqi people—and to our country as well. (See the article by Dr. Cromwell on pages 34-39.)

This spring, Tom will receive the highest honor the CSA can bestow, the Distinguished Service Award (DSA). He is being so honored for a career in anesthesia in which his achievements outside the operating room have earned the respect and gratitude of anesthesiologists all across the country. He is being honored because the same willingness to promote the common good which is taking him to Iraq, has been his guide throughout his personal and professional life.

I first met Tom through our mutual involvement in the CSA in the late 1980s. Until 1992 I saw Tom mostly at CSA meetings where I was much influenced by the style and quality of his leadership. Tom was well organized, well prepared, led by example. As president, he reigned patiently over meetings while

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encouraging everyone to participate, even Shwachman! Beyond that he was personable and approachable, a welcoming combination for those new to the organization.

Tom’s involvement at ASA increased in the early 1990s, at the same time as our two anesthesia groups in San Francisco merged. Tom retained the chairmanship of the combined group. During the next ten years I watched as he led our group through the tumultuous early 1990s, a challenging time for anesthesiologists beset by the growing power of managed care executives, hospital administrators and the federal government. I also watched as Tom left his mark on the affairs of our profession through his national leadership in the areas of managed care, peer review, membership recruitment and retention, and legislative advocacy.

As busy as Tom was in his professional life, he has had an equally important and prosperous personal life. With Jeanne, his gracious and talented wife of 28 years, he has raised three beautiful daughters who are just embarking on their own careers. Tom’s commitment to public service also extends to home life where he has just received a helmet honoring his thirty years as a volunteer fireman. He also chairs the local emergency preparedness committee and even acts as an honorary commodore for local maritime events.

Over the years I have seen many people benefit from Tom’s willingness to get involved and work on their behalf. Whether he is hosting a going away party for a retiring colleague, calling all over the state trying to find a residency slot for a deserving young physician, or organizing a reception for a colleague following in his own footsteps at CSA (the author), Tom always looks for ways to help others. He is one of those rare people who simply make the world a better place in which to live. In elevating Tom to the ranks of previous DSA winners, the CSA has exemplified the true spirit of that honor.