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PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARIZONA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

The Old West cowboy pictured above doing his best far-off-into-the-horizon stare is Arizona Dental Association Board of Directors President Donald Simpson. Simpson has played Doc Holliday in reenactments of the shootout at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone for the past 10 years.

# Arizona dentists mark 100 years, honor 'Doc' Holliday

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Arizona's most famous dentist was posthumously inducted into the Arizona Dental Association (AzDA) at a celebration marking the association's 100th year. But the dead man who was honored was known more for slinging guns than fixing teeth.

A plaque in honor of John Henry "Doc" Holliday, who was immortalized after the shootout at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone and the ensuing vendetta killings led by Wyatt Earp, was presented earlier this year to his distant cousin

Karen Holliday Tanner.

Dr. Donald Simpson, who was elected recently as president of AzDA's board of directors, is a Doc Holliday buff, and he has played the role of Holliday for the past 10 years in Tombstone re-enactments of the shootout at the O.K. Corral.

According to historical accounts, Holliday came to the aid of his friends, the Earps, during a feud with Ike Clanton's gang of cowboys in Tombstone in 1881. Only three men were killed during the shootout, but a handful of others died at the hands of

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## Tombstone

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the Earps, and possibly Holliday, in the following years.

"I always admired his loyalty to his friends," Simpson says.

Simpson says Holliday came from a family of physicians and was an excellent dentist, even winning a prize at a county fair in Texas. But other records indicate Holliday practiced dentistry for only about five years before tuberculosis, and the coughing that accompanies it, caused him to seek other work — most notably, gambling.

But dentistry has come a long way since 1872, when Holliday graduated from dental school. In fact, Simpson says dentistry has come a long way even since he graduated in 1975.

"At the time I graduated, we didn't even use gloves, except for surgery," says Simpson. "They called us 'wet-fingered dentists.'"

Simpson looked at a picture of a dentist from the 1890s as a reminder of how far the field of dentistry has come. Back then, dentistry often meant pulling out rotten teeth.

Today, dentists use computers, lasers and titanium implants. And dentists always have been progressive, Simpson says, pointing out that dentists were quicker than physicians to embrace the use of anesthesia in painful procedures.

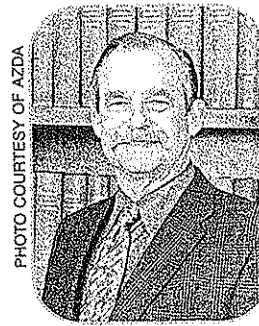


PHOTO COURTESY OF AZDA

**Donald Simpson, president,**  
Arizona Dental Association  
Board of Directors

At the Western Regional Dental Convention at the Phoenix Convention Center in March, the latest industry gadgetry was unveiled as 6,000 attendees gathered for workshops, exhibitions and the association's yearly election of officers. It is one of the nation's 10 largest dental industry meetings, says Kevin Earle, executive director of AzDA.

In addition to the election of Simpson, of Sierra Vista, as president, other new officers are: Dr. Mark Hughes of Phoenix, president-elect; Dr. Bryan Shanahan of Flagstaff, vice president; and Dr. Greg Pafford of Phoenix, secretary.

Although attendance was a bit lower than last year's record of about 6,300, the annual convention has grown considerably over the years.

In 1909, when Arizona was still a territory, the first meeting of the Arizona Dental Association welcomed nine dentist attendees. Expense ledgers included two \$5 charges for cigars, and members paid \$5 in dues. Today, AzDA repre-

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## Screening

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sents about 2,500 Arizona dentists or about 85 percent of the dentists statewide, says Earle.

As an association representing so many of Arizona's dental professionals, AzDA works with the Arizona Board of Dental Examiners and the state Legislature to promote oral health and education in Arizona, Earle says.

Among the issues the association is focusing on is a measure to institute dental screening for all children entering school in Arizona in order to catch oral health problems early.

Already, the association has started a pilot program with Mesa Public Schools, the largest school district in the state.

In Arizona, about 65 percent of children under 13 have some form of tooth decay, says Simpson. The leading causes of school absences are tooth decay and oral pain, says Earle.

The association is working on a set of new regulations for mobile dentistry units that travel to underserved areas in the state. The units are essentially RVs with a dentist chair and a mini-office inside, and right now the state has no regulations on these vehicles.

The group is working with Board of Dental Examiners to create standards to regulate record keeping, equipment and insurance billing in mobile units.

Simpson says the goal was not to shut down the mobile units, but to regulate them to protect patients. If something goes wrong with some dental work after a visit, it's difficult for patients to seek follow-up care once the mobile unit has left the area.

"These units go to underserved areas, and that's great, but they are not well-regulated," says Simpson. Underserved areas can be isolated rural communities or low-income neighborhoods, places where access to dental care is restricted by location or income level.

The association also is working with the Legislature to defend the use of AHCCCS funding for emergency dental care. If an abscess develops in a tooth, the pain can be excruciating. If it is not cared for by a qualified dentist immediately, at a cost of usually less than \$1,000, it can turn into a \$13,000 medical bill, says Simpson. AzDA is working to keep emergency dental care under AHCCCS coverage, in spite of attempts to cut it from the budget.

AzDA has been the main voice of dental professionals to the Legislature, and the efforts have not gone unnoticed. The American Dental Association has awarded the association a Golden Apple Award for "Legislative Achievement" in the past for efforts to develop stricter licensure procedures, says Earle.

"I'm very proud of our association's legislative agenda," Simpson says. "Our legislative agenda is not self-centered. We're trying to maintain public health. We're taxpayers, too."

Unfortunately, the Legislature is not advancing much leg-



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARIZONA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

New Arizona Dental Association officers are sworn in at the Western Regional Dental Convention on March 14. From left to right: Donald Simpson, president; Mark Hughes, president-elect; Bryan Shanahan, vice-president; Todd Hellwig, treasurer; Regina Cobb, immediate past president; Gregg Pafford, secretary and Lisa Lear, speaker of the house.

islation this year as it deals with serious budget problems, says Simpson.

In addition to its legislative involvement, the association also donates about \$500,000 a year in pro-bono dental care to underserved Arizonans through the Arizona Dental Foundation, the charity wing of AzDA, Earle said.

The group holds 10 to 12 events per year as part of the "Give Kids a Smile" program. Working with local schools and communities, the program targets children in grades six through 12 who may not otherwise have access to dental care.

The Arizona Dental Foundation also serves seniors and special-needs patients. "We have over 100 dentists trained to treat special-needs patients," Simpson says.

In hard economic times, people are foregoing regular dental check-ups and necessary dental procedures, or they instead go to Mexico for more affordable dental care options. But many dentists offer treatment options that balance care with payment, says Earle.

"Most dentists want to maintain that relationship (with the patient) long-term," Earle says. "Most dentists will work with patients in hard financial times." Earle urges caution in going south of the border for dental care because of the risk. If a procedure goes wrong, there is very little that can be done.

"Oral health is the key to overall systemic health," says Earle. Simpson cites diabetes and obesity as possible results of poor oral health.

As AzDA celebrates its 100th birthday, Simpson sums up the long legacy of dentistry in Arizona: "We're proud of our association and we're proud of dentistry," he says. "We're here to serve the public and our members." 