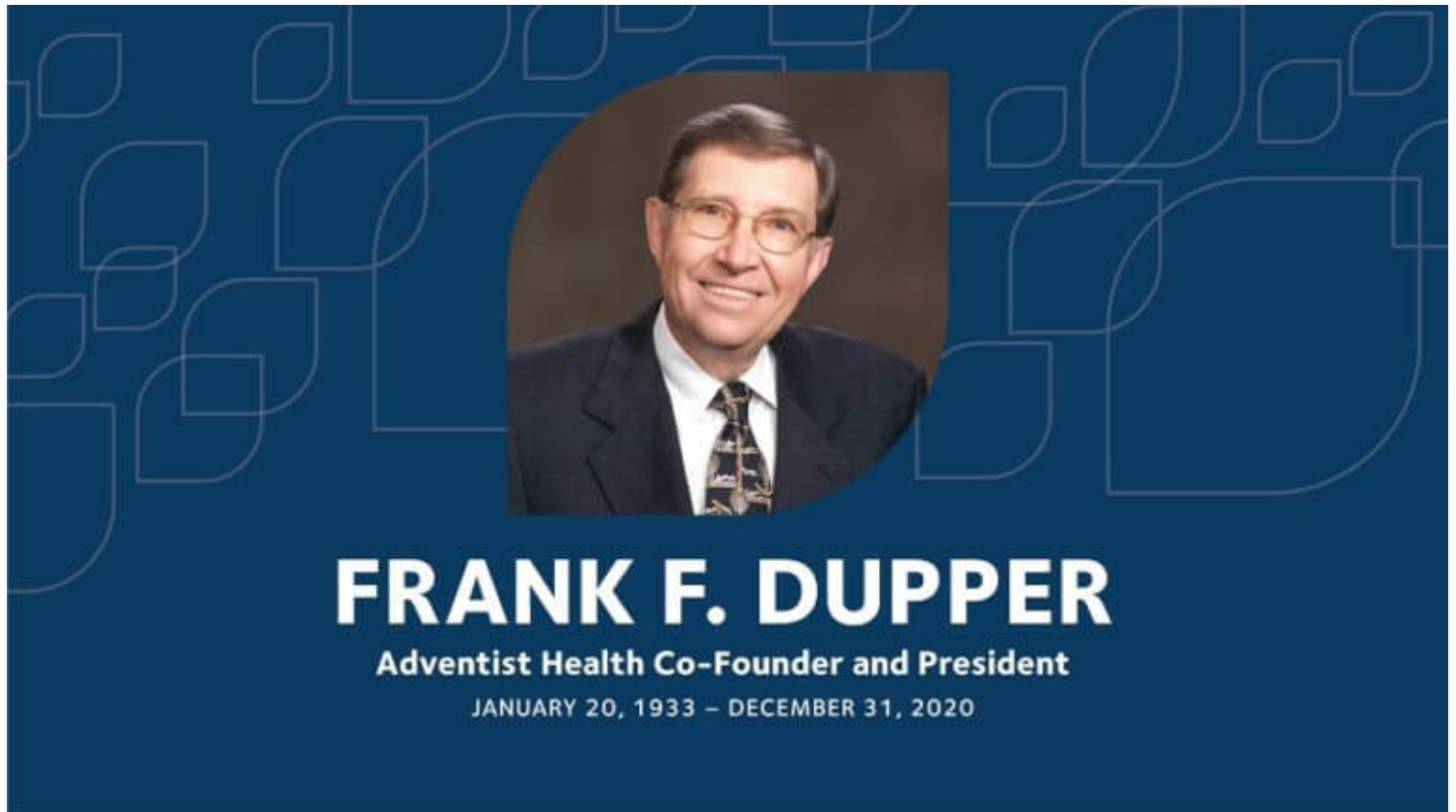




Remembering Frank F. Dupper, Co-founder and President of Adventist Health



By Rita Waterman

Healthcare lost a larger-than-life figure when Frank F. Dupper passed away December 31, 2020 – 22 years to the day after he retired as president of [Adventist Health](#) – culminating a storied, three-decade career with the West Coast health system.

One of the founders of Adventist Health, Frank left a legacy that inspires the organization today, said Adventist Health CEO Scott Reiner. “While I never had a chance to work directly with Frank, he affected me deeply through the profound impact he had on our organization’s culture and the private conversations we shared that were always so encouraging and centered on the focus of our work: our mission.”



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Frank was born January 20, 1933, at a farmhouse in Beebe Draw, Colorado, to a German-speaking immigrant couple, Henry and Caroline Dupper. One of seven siblings, he recalled not having electricity at the farm until he was 10 or 12 and milking cows by hand. He would be served well professionally by that grit and work ethic, as well as by dealing with polio, which he referred to as a “blessing from God.” Succeeding against the odds would be a recurrent theme in Frank’s life as a leader, where he faced formidable challenges with resourcefulness and faith.

Frank attended high school at Campion Academy in Loveland, Colorado, and graduated with his bachelor’s degree from Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, with high honors in 1954. The first decade of his career was spent teaching accounting and working as a treasurer for church schools. While at Fresno Union Academy, he met his future wife, Norma Eder, and the couple married on June 24, 1956.

While working at Newbury Park Academy in Southern California in 1964, Frank was recruited to be controller at Glendale Sanitarium & Hospital (now Adventist Health Glendale), where he advanced to vice president of finance. In the early 1970s, the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s hospitals were a very loose association. With other like-minded administrators, Frank helped frame a bold, seemingly impossible vision: Create a healthcare system with economies of scale and centralized services to drive cost savings, operational efficiencies and shared mission. In July 1974, Frank became the first vice president of what was then known as Adventist Health Services. When reminiscing about those early days, Frank was quick to invoke the name of his mentor and boss, Erwin Remboldt, whom he affectionately called “Chief.” In 1980, Frank would succeed Erwin as president of Adventist Health System/West, a forerunner of the \$4 billion integrated health system Adventist Health is today.

A tireless and innovative leader, Frank played a direct role in many early organizational milestones that showcased both his ingenuity and strategic mindset. One of his first accomplishments in 1974 was self-insuring the system for hospital professional liability/general liability. Two years later, he facilitated a systemwide group purchasing program. He also established an internal auditing department enabling legions of young people to achieve their CPAs and become future finance officers. Home health agencies were added, and, thanks to his business acumen, many alliances as well as joint ventures formed. In the mid-1980s, Frank and his senior team moved the system’s headquarters to Roseville, California. This abbreviated list of notable achievements doesn’t come close to capturing how Frank’s staff, executive team or industry colleagues best remember him.

Frank was an embodiment of integrity and servant leadership who also set a high bar. More than one person confessed that no boss ever got as much from them as Frank did, because nobody wanted to disappoint him! His handwritten notes are treasured still today. His signature line, “Big Thanks, Frank,” was often penned in the first page of a book sent as a gift to his management team and even competitors. Those books were most often spiritual



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in nature, which reflected Frank's Christian faith.

Frank was a man of prayer who more than once knelt in his corner office imploring God to guide him while leading the organization in chaotic times. No single incident better captures his fervent pleas for divine intervention than in 1989 when a draft of California Senate Bill 855 was shared with Frank. It established funds for hospitals that provide a high percentage of charity care (free or reduced-cost care) and serve a disproportionately high number of Medi-Cal patients. Frank would tearfully recount how prayer coupled with a few word changes at the midnight hour miraculously meant that select Adventist Health hospitals would qualify for funds from that bill, enabling them to serve needy communities.

Frank's impact on the health system that he loved so much as well as those he encountered day to day is too vast to quantify. His contributions were large and small; spiritual and cultural; technical and philosophical; professional; and - to so many individuals - very personal. When paying tribute to Frank at his retirement events, speakers applauded him as someone who truly made a difference in the lives he touched. That distinctive characteristic earned him extraordinary admiration and respect from people of all walks of life.

Upon Frank's retirement, Adventist Health established the Dupper Internship Program. To date, approximately 200 young professionals have benefited from the opportunity to learn and grow while working within the healthcare system. The program continues Frank's long legacy of mentoring and cultivating young leaders for service to others.

While he worked hard, Frank played hard, too! He was a practical joker who impishly added salt to the water glasses of his table mates at some of the finer restaurants they frequented. Planting fake bugs on salads and dinner plates was another favorite prank, much to the horror and amusement of his victims. He was a kid at heart with an easy laugh who enjoyed a good joke even at his own expense.

While sometimes characterized as a workaholic, Frank also was a devoted husband to Norma, his wife of 64 years, and father to Debbie (Mark) Ashlock and Brent (Sylvia) Dupper. He was the family pancake-maker and bargain-hunter. Frank loved gardening in the yard of his Granite Bay home and tending to his fruit trees. He was beloved as "Pops" to four grandchildren and three great grandchildren. His legacy of service continues in that his children, their spouses and even grandchildren have worked or are working in healthcare today.

One of Frank's most frequently recited quotes was, "They don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." To his family, throngs of friends, fellow church members and colleagues Frank remains a hero for whom we cared very much. Big thanks, Frank!



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Memorial gifts in Frank's honor may be directed to the Frank Dupper Memorial Fund at AdventistHealth.org/giving in the "How to donate" section or mailed to Philanthropy Department, Adventist Health, ONE Adventist Health Way, Roseville, CA 95661. Those with questions are invited to call 916-406-0688 or send an email to giving@ah.org.