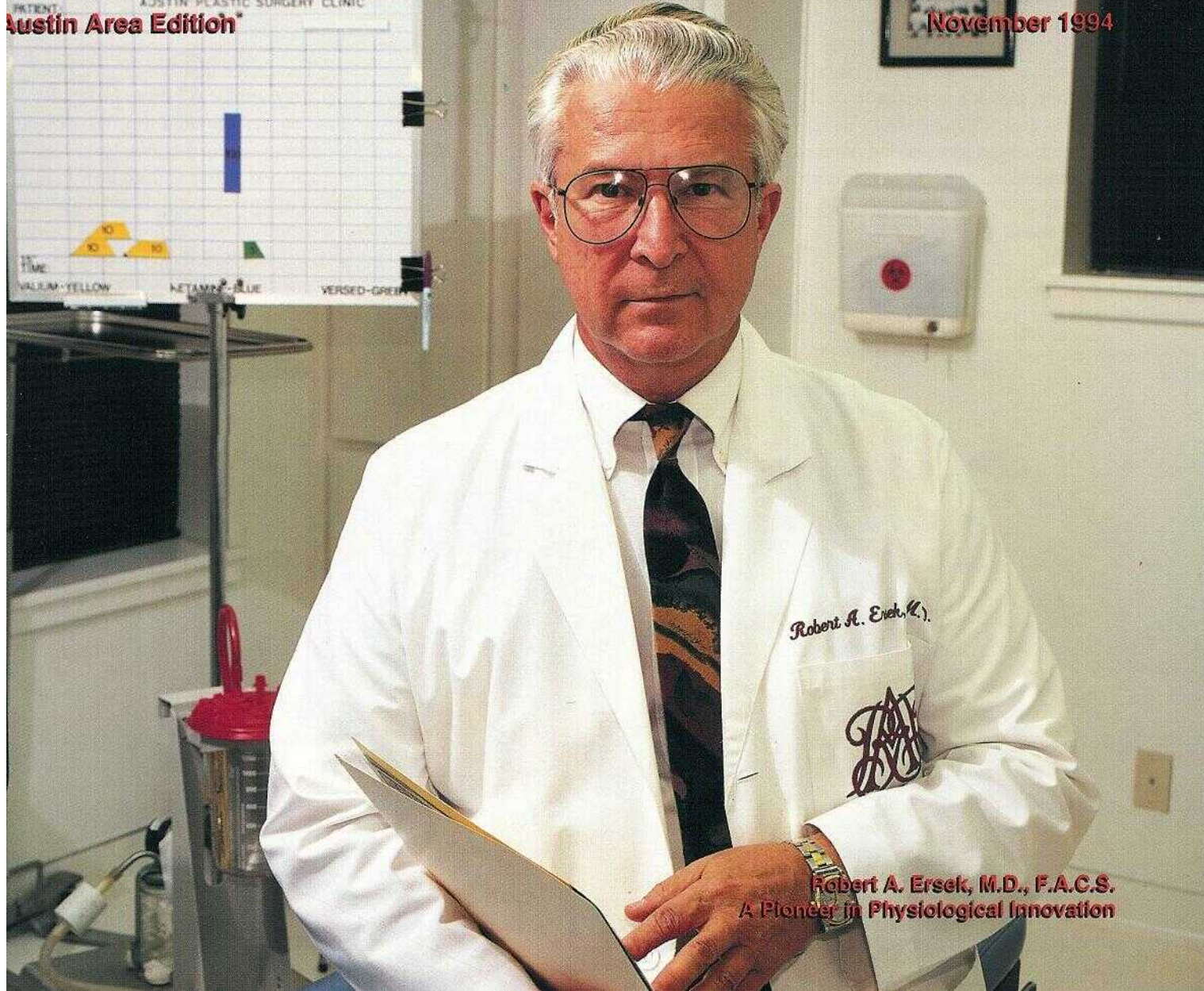


M.D. NEWS™

PATIENT
AUSTIN PLASTIC SURGERY CLINIC
Austin Area Edition™

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Robert A. Ersek, M.D., F.A.C.S.
A Pioneer in Physiological Innovation

PLASTIC SURGERY CLINIC OF AUSTIN "Shaping the Face of Austin"

By Julie Yioutas

"Plastic surgery is a joy to everyone, when things go well. The amazing thing is, all of our patients are getting better. They're not all becoming perfect, but they're all getting better..."

More than 20 years in plastic surgery has not diminished Dr. Robert Ersek's love for it. Not only does he maintain a busy practice, much of his time is dedicated to advancing plastic surgery techniques and pioneering new products. His patients make his practice very rewarding.

"Plastic surgery is a joy to everyone, when things go well. The amazing thing is, all of our patients are getting better. They're not all becoming perfect, but they're all getting better. All day long, it's mostly positive reinforcement," he said.

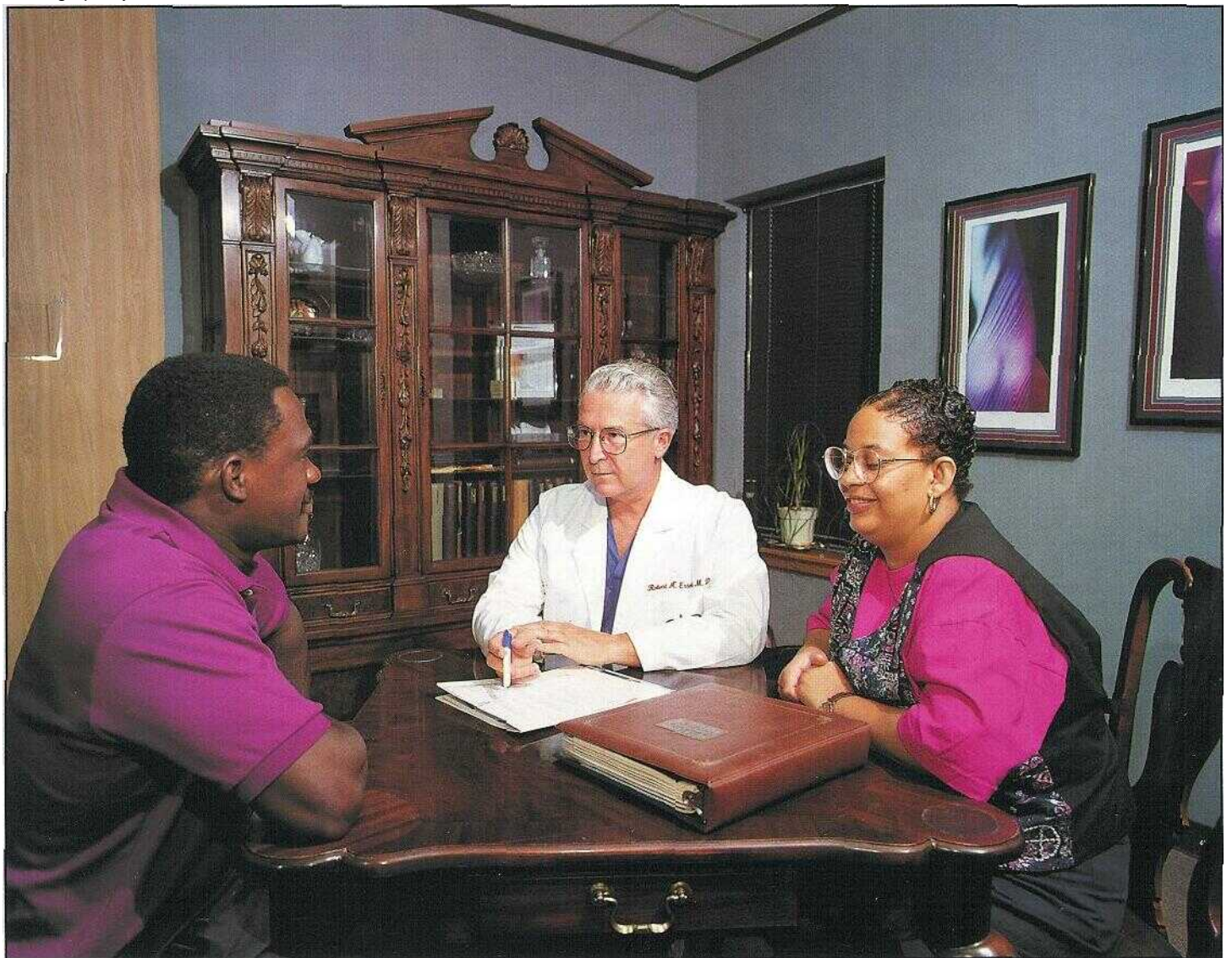
Doing good work tops his priority

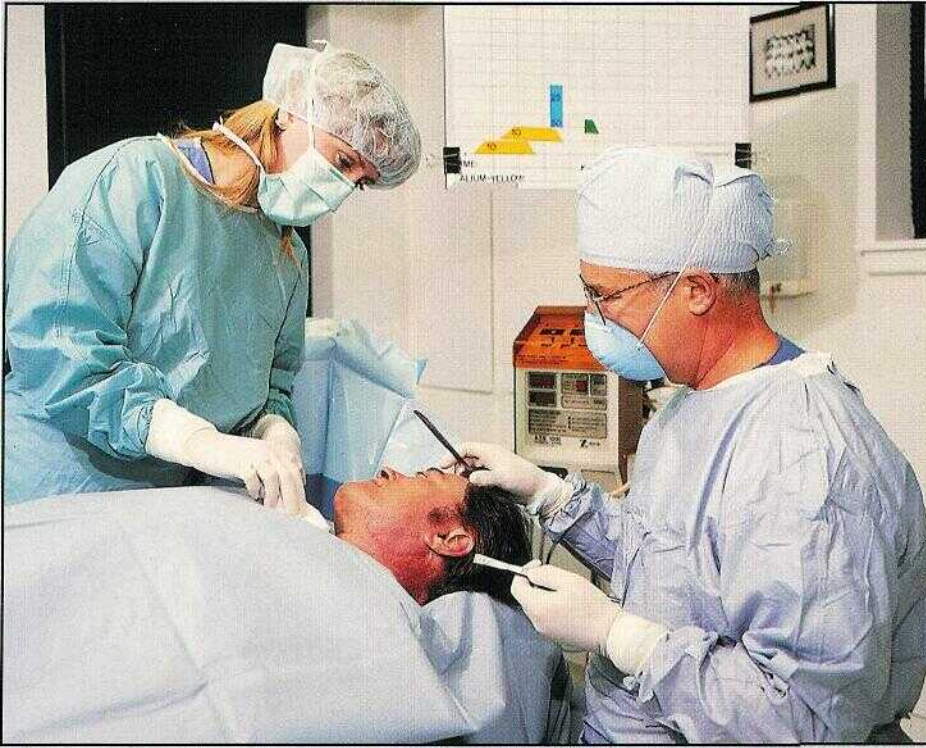
list.

"The cases that we do, we want to do very well. So I have gradually limited my practice through the years to things where I either fortuitously developed some superb training, or have an interest in," Ersek explained.

Although he has gained extensive experience in hand cases, in recent

Patients and families are briefed on the techniques and the expected outcome. A rapport is essential to obtain the most satisfactory results. Photograph by Bob Roberts.





A "state of the art" plastic operating room. Approximately 90 percent of surgeries can be performed with mild sedation and local anesthesia. Photograph by Bob Roberts.

years most of his time has been spent on aesthetic plastic surgery. These procedures include hair transplants, facelifts, eyelifts, rhinoplasty, liposuction and breast reduction or augmentation. Since the procedures are elective, most of his patients are referrals, which leaves little time for emergency work.

"The elective aesthetic patient comes to us because we did somebody's sister. It's a personal kind of referral. So, our practice has evolved into an aesthetic elective plastic surgery, although that was never my specific goal, and I would be very happy to be doing hand surgery half the day," he said.

The other important things in his life are his family and kids, which originally attracted him to Austin.

"I looked around the world for a nice place to raise two girls. They have grown up and done very well, and I am just delighted. Austin couldn't be a better place," said Ersek.

He gives much of the credit for his enjoyment of the city to his peers in the medical community; in particular, Dr. Bob Askew, the chief of General Surgery at Seton, with

whom he had his first interview in the area.

"In other places, people are very competitive and often difficult to get along with. When I came here in '78, I was welcomed with open arms and made to feel an important part of the medical community right from the

Patients are fully awake within one to two hours after local anesthesia in a quiet, private recovery area. Photograph by Bob Roberts.



beginning," he said.

Dr. Ersek is especially appreciative of the other plastic surgeons.

"I believe we have been able to do quite well because of the cooperation of the other 20 plastic surgeons here in Austin. We all work together and help each other with difficult cases. We owe that cooperation to Frank Morris and Bill Bames, the first two plastic surgeons here in Austin," he said.

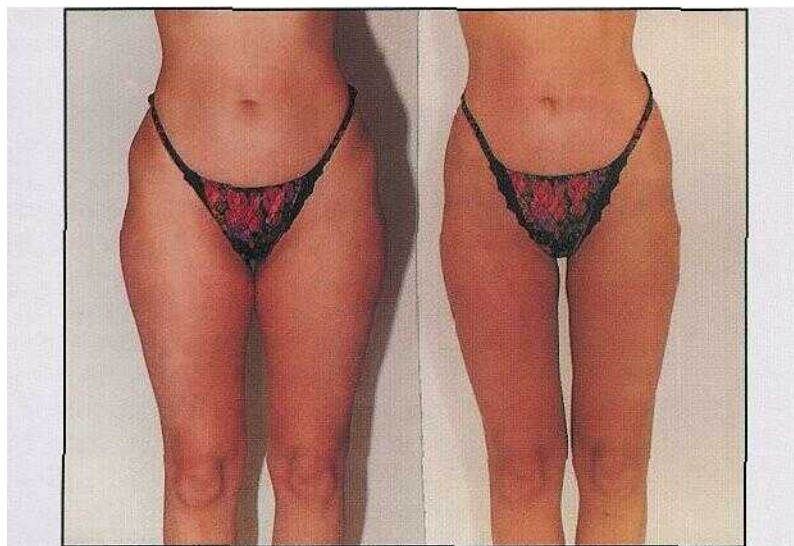
The foundation of Austin Smiles in 1987 stands as a monument to the teamwork that exists among Austin plastic surgeons.

"Jim Cullington, Brackenridge's Physician of the Year; Pat Beckham, one of our outstanding hand surgeons for the past 20 years, and Jim Fox, who has done trend-setting work on the *Manly Neck*, started Austin Smiles from a dream," Ersek explained.

The non-profit group sends plastic surgeons to Third World countries to perform reconstructive surgery on children. So far, they have helped 1,783 people. Dr. Ersek, who has taken two trips to rural Mexico, describes it as the "grandest kind of diplomacy."

"We restore and make whole those parts which nature or ill fortune have taken away, not so much to delight the eye, but to buoy up the spirit of the afflicted."

Gaspere Tagliacozzi, 1597



"One of the really wonderful things about practicing plastic surgery is that we can go to the most remote places, carry our instruments and anesthesia with us, and do cleft Ups and palates. It is surgery that changes the very lives of children, and the whole village sees this dramatic difference," he said.

Many other medical procedures require special equipment or use general anesthesia. These tools and facilities are not available in remote areas, so patients have to be flown to the United States.

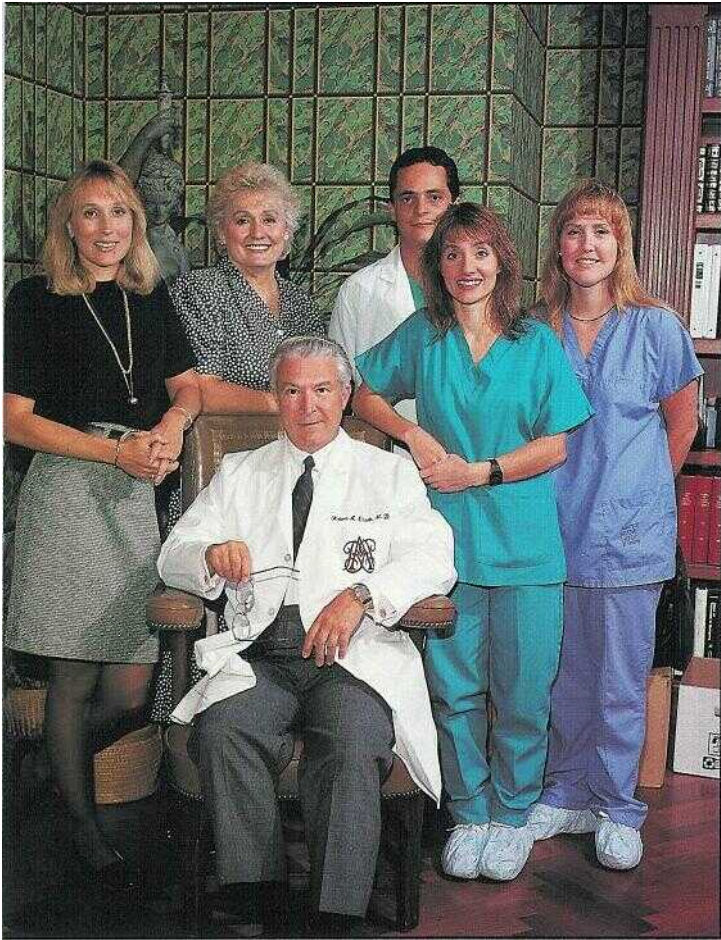
"We can put everything in a suitcase that's required to do surgery. We go down to government clinics that are made for delivering babies, where they have a sterilizer. That's all we need. We turn it into a plastic surgery center and bring people in from miles around," he illustrated.

Although most of the work is done on children, Austin Smiles also helps adults. One 63-year-old man who had lived with a cleft lip all his life received corrective surgery during one of the trips. "When we went back six months later, this man walked 40 miles out of the jungle to come and thank us, and tell us that we were going to heaven. For the first time in his life, he was able to get a job," he explained.

Austin Smiles is not the only place where Austin physicians volunteer.

"While Bob Clement was our first Society president for several years, and Rick Parker specializes in one of the best series of Latisimus Dorsi Flaps in the world, all of the plastic surgeons and most of the other doctors, although they have private practices, take call and cover Brackenridge as well as Seton's Caritas," he illustrated.

Ballet Austin and the Austin Symphony are other causes to which Dr. Ersek dedicates his time. He is a member of the Knights of the Symphony, and for the past 14 years he has outbid everyone for the right to conduct one number at the Pops concert. The honor, each time, is for his wife Gerry, who studied the French horn in college. "She has



A congenial staff maintains a family atmosphere at the clinic. Staff members become acquainted with the patient and the members of the patient's family. Photograph by Bob Roberts.

been the most consistent, persistent guest conductor," he said.

Dr. Ersek earned his medical degree at Hahnemann Medical College in 1966, and interned at the University of Minnesota Hospitals in surgery. During the '60s, when he was making decisions about a specialty, innovations in cardiology dominated the headlines. All of the breakthroughs captured his attention. "I had been involved in cardiovascular training and general surgery without an absolute certainty of what I was going to do, but I knew I wanted to be a surgeon," he said.

Many of the innovations in plastic surgery, both reconstructive and aesthetic, resulted from treating war casualties. It was only fitting that while serving during Vietnam, Dr. Ersek made a discovery of his own. "It was the exposure to the bum units, where I saw what plastic surgery was really doing, and I realized that that's what I ought to be doing with my life," he recalled.

As Dr. Ersek looks back now, he realizes that if he would have spent more time with plastic surgery in the beginning, he would have known that it would be his specialty. The few cases he saw in medical school fascinated him.

It would seem that plastic surgery is in his blood; indirectly, that is. The term plastic surgery was first used by Dr. Johann Friedrich Dieffenbach in the 1840s in Berlin. While working at the Tulane University School of Medicine, he

met Dr. Ken Dieffenbach, a fellow plastic surgeon, professor at LSU, and the great-grand-nephew of Dr. Dieffenbach of Berlin.

He discovered that Ken Dieffenbach's mother's maiden name was Rothermel. Dr. Ersek's mother's stepmother's sister married a Rothermel in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where Ken Dieffenbach is from. "So quite clearly," he said with a chuckle, "I am an indirect descendent of the great Dr. Dieffenbach of Berlin."

Aside from the family tradition, other indicators predicted his affinity for plastic surgery. During medical school, in addition to research and his role as president of the Student AMA, he was a hobby photographer and co-editor of the yearbook. He and his partner took, developed, and printed all the pictures themselves.

"I have this artistic and yet mechanical aptitude. So through the years, I have developed things and made things, and I think plastic surgery is like that. Every case we do is different. People who are artistic and who are willing to do things differently tend to end up in plastic surgery," Ersek explained.

Much of his latest work has been concentrated on liposuction. Specifically, he focused on new types of incisions and serial liposuction to remove large quantities of fat. "It (liposuction) has revolutionized the way we can

Dr. Ersek, his wife Gerry, two daughters, son-in-law, and granddaughter. This is truly a "family practice" with everyone assisting with tasks at the clinic. Photograph by Bob Roberts.



change the form and function of the body. It is certainly the most dramatic, minimally invasive procedure ever developed," he said.

In addition to working on the procedural aspects, Dr. Ersek is also the president-elect of the Liposplasty Society of America, a group of board certified plastic surgeons dedicated to safe liposuction.

"The results of aesthetic plastic surgery are dependent not only on the patient, but who performs the surgery," Ersek commented.

Another area in which he has worked, and believes more work needs to be done, is the development of safer breast implant materials.

"All the controversy you have heard about silicone breast implants has in no way diminished the desire or need for breast augmentation and reconstruction surgery. Safer, more biocompatible materials are available, and need to be developed and used in practice," he said.

Dr. Ersek, along with Dr. A. A. Beisang, developed both the gel and surface of an implant called MISTI GOLD™. These implants solved three problems traditionally associated with silicon implants.

First, the MISTI™ surface pattern reduces the rate of capsular contracture, or the formation of a fibrous scar capsule which contracts around the implant, causing the breasts to feel hard to the touch. Second, the use of BIO-ONCOTIC™ GEL, which is biocompatible in both pH and osmotic pressure, eliminates the complications of silicone gel bleed. Finally, both elements possess a higher level of X-ray translucence, which allows better mammograms.

Although cleared for marketing by the FDA, they were swept off the market during the silicone gel controversy. They are still one of the market leaders in Europe, and Dr. Ersek hopes that one day they will return to the United States.

His next planned experiment involves scar tissue formation. Dr. Ersek shares the philosophy of Earl Peacock, M.D., a plastic surgeon who



Dr. Ersek's parents, Joe and Theda, complete the four generations represented. Mr. Ersek provides assistance with corporate administration.

said that most of medicine is just control of scar tissue formation. "In the case of the gastric ulcer, we're trying to get it to heal and form a scar. In the case of a heart defect, you either have a hole where you don't want one, or you don't have a hole where you need one. It's just a matter of scar formation," he said.

He briefly explained what he plans to do, "I'm coating the injured area with a polymer that will prevent the adhesion of wrong surfaces, but allow healing of the right ones. And, it's a

polymer that is dispersed by the body."

More than 30 inventions and patented processes and products have been developed by Dr. Ersek. They range from the lighting used in his operating room to surgical clips and micro-implants. His innovations are helping surgery evolve into a procedure that is minimally invasive on patients' bodies and lives, and help him and the other plastic surgeons in the area continue to shape the face of Austin.

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