Making a difference

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Leadership by Spartan Engineer John L’Hote (‘49) helped create the MSU College of Osteopathic Medicine

Alumni update – Spartan Engineer John L’Hote of Bloomfield Hills, a 1949 mechanical engineering graduate, is now approaching his 100th birthday. Had he not used his leadership skills and training in facility planning, construction, operation, and maintenance, today’s MSU College of Osteopathic Medicine (MSUCOM) may not have been. This story was written by Pat Grauer for the MSUCOM publication, Communique, for the college’s 50th anniversary last fall. It is reprinted with permission.

If John L’Hote (‘49 MECH EGR) hadn’t stepped up to the plate 50 years ago, the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine might have been something entirely different than it is today.

In 1965, he only knew about osteopathic medicine from a D.O. neighbor. By 1970, he was leading the Michigan profession in negotiating with legislators and university presidents – with the same steadfast confidence he has approached everything in a remarkable life.

L’Hote – trim, pleasant, and articulate – is now 98, living with his wife of 76 years, Harriet in Bloomfield Hills. They met for five minutes at the Highland Park High School commencement, and the rest was history. They went to junior college together, and he worked nights at a trucking company. She went to Michigan State. He went to work at Great Lakes Steel. She graduated. They got married, and just before he was sent oversees for World War II, the first of three children was born.

A pattern was emerging in L’Hote’s life, one in which, as he puts it, “People have always assumed that I would be able to cope with leading something that needed doing.”
At 17, he was a porter on a cruise ship. At Great Lakes, he was hired on the labor gang and promoted twice in a few months. During the war, sent as an electrician to the combat rest center, the major in charge asked him if he’d like to run the facility. “How can I do that? I’m only a private first class. ‘Don’t worry,’ the major said. ‘We won’t tell anybody.’ For the rest of the war, L’Hote led the staff and significant resources at the center, providing muddy soldiers coming in from the front with clean uniforms, showers, and medical and dental care.

The end of the war found them both at Michigan State College – Harriett as a graduate assistant, and he as student under the GI Bill, working as a custodian at the Spartan Nursery School, where their son attended.

“I find it interesting that I was cleaning toilets at the nursery school, and six years later I was working as the supervising engineer for the Detroit Public School System. I had over 2,000 people cleaning toilets for me.” That job, which included a $30 million annual budget, lasted for 30 years.

**SERVICE TO MSUCOM**

By this time L’Hote was a nationally recognized authority on educational facilities, their planning, construction, operation, and maintenance. Following a party at the home of his D.O. neighbor, he was asked to assist in the construction of the Michigan College of Osteopathic Medicine in Pontiac – MSUCOM’s private forebear. He agreed, and attended the first meeting.

“No one else showed,” he said. “For the whole design period I was the only person who represented the osteopathic profession in the design of an osteopathic college.”

He worked with the architects, assisted the development of a $40 million campus plan, and directed the work of the contractor – often as a volunteer.

The “development building” went up in 1966, staff moved in, and the first dean, Myron S. Magen, and faculty were hired. Groundbreaking occurred on the larger “staging building” in late 1968, a major teaching facility which was completed in 1971, just in time for enrollment of the first MCOM class.

L’Hote was elected to the MCOM corporate board, and by 1968, he was chairing it – a position to which he was re-elected repeatedly. Once again, he found himself asked to fulfill a role with no precedent in his life, and he jumped in to make it work.

Before the full campus plan could be completed, a move was afoot to make MCOM a public college, and L’Hote found himself testifying before many committees of the Michigan legislature. He was successful.

The act creating a public college of osteopathic medicine was passed in 1969 but required that it be located on the campus with an existing medical school – within 90 days!

L’Hote led the team who met with the leadership at Wayne State University and the University of Michigan, and Michigan State, and found “welcome” among the Spartans. The school moved to campus in 1971, and the property in Pontiac was transferred to the Michigan Osteopathic College Foundation.

MSUCOM was the first osteopathic college to be located at a major university and the first to be publicly assisted.

L’Hote received significant recognition for his work in starting MCOM. He was one of the first class (in 1971) to receive the Walter F. Patenge Medal of Public Service, the highest honor awarded from MSUCOM. He was awarded an Honorary Lay Membership and a Presidential Citation, both from the Michigan Association of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons; a Distinguished Service Certificate from the American Osteopathic Association; a diploma from Pontiac Osteopathic Hospital; a citation from the Michigan Osteopathic College Foundation, and a resolution from the Michigan legislature.

If John L’Hote hadn’t stepped up to the plate 50 years ago, the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic
Medicine might have been something entirely different than it is today: providing leadership in osteopathic education and primary care, substantive research, advocacy for osteopathic principles and practice, unparalleled graduate medical education opportunities, and a strong international presence.

Related Website: MSUCOM Communique, Fall 2015
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