

For Barton docs Orr-thropedics is in their DNA



Jeff and Terry Orr share athletic and professional interests. Photo/Provided

By Susan Wood

One could argue Orr stands for orthopedics at Lake Tahoe.

With Barton bringing on Jeffrey Orr, 37, to its Tahoe Orthopedics group in September, the healthcare organization carries on a legacy built around one of the most renowned and accomplished orthopedic surgeons in this region. His father is Terry Orr.

Between names like Orr, Swanson and Bannar, the half-kidding joke around the lake is if you're going to bust up your knee, elbow or other critical joint – do it near Tahoe. The difference between being average or returning to the level of athlete you were depends on a doctor with years of experience and care with precision.

Even though the Orr family had the popular board game “Operation” around the house, the elder Orr said he and his wife never pressured their children to go into medicine. (Note: There's also Dr. Lance Orr in the emergency room – albeit no relation.)

It just came natural. That's the gist of the discussion in the younger Orr coming home after a whirlwind tour of hard work, focused studies and a strong dedication in his fellowship and residency on the East Coast. In between, Jeff received his medical doctorate from Georgetown University.

While his father stayed in Tahoe over the decades to care for professional, competitive and wannabe athletes, Orr left his childhood home in South Lake Tahoe to study aerospace engineering at UC San Diego for a year because he liked math. It wasn't meant to be though as it only offered “limited interaction with people,” Orr told *Lake Tahoe News* in an after-hours fireside chat with his father in the clinic's waiting room area.



Father and son – Terry and Jeff Orr – at this month's Barton gala. Photo/Provided

As it turns out, Orr is too much of a people person and passed on fixing and designing machines.

Instead, he found a home in medicine – and more specifically orthopedics like his father, forging a path that provided the reward of helping patients transcend from an injury to the restoration of their lives.

Both admit that's not easy.

Orr senior describes a day and age when a patient's recovery was all up to the doctor telling the patient what to do. Now, in what's called the "shared experience," patients share in the experience of recovery and dictate goals for their desired outcome.

"The field of medicine has changed a lot," Terry Orr said.

With the constant evolution of new things to know, the learning never stops – even if you're considered the finest in the field. The elder Orr still takes continuing education units.

When asked if he thought his son would end up being better than he is, the modest Orr didn't hesitate, answering: "Absolutely."

And part of that "shared experience" is between the father-and-son surgeons, as the elder can pass on what he's learned over the years. The younger hasn't hesitated at gaining guidance from his father – even if it just means moral support.

The field comes with long hours and a constant expectation at being nurturing and brilliant at the same time. All this with a drive to keep up with trends and turning those trends into creative, new ways to help the increasing number of weekend warriors and competitive athletes live long and prosper.

"If you look at orthopedics, so much changes with the medical knowledge in just a decade, you have to wonder where things are going to be 20 years from now," the elder Orr said.

Hands down, the longtime surgeon is proud of his son.

In turn, his son exudes a sharp-as-a-tack level of intelligence. He also has inherited the senior Orr's well known calm and collected nature – which can be a blessing to anyone suffering nagging or debilitating injuries. The two men

understand all too well what it's like to overcome a setback with the joints. And not everyone is patient about it (as this reporter attests to when she relied on Orr senior).

Jeff Orr has not only assisted with the patients' recoveries; he's lived the experiences. He didn't wince when listing his surgeries – two ankles, a knee and a shoulder. After all, he downhill skis, rides a mountain bike and plays hockey (with his dad).

Orr senior said he's been luckier – listing the annoying the plantar fasciitis on his foot and a broken hand.

To hear the two men speak of the gnarliest injuries they've seen is to hear them speak in code. It's a language they'll always share.

Beyond Orr junior taking rotations at the hospital and moving into the Center for Orthopedics and Wellness facility next year, he will join his father for yet another Olympic-oriented assignment. For years, Orr senior served as the U.S. Men's Ski Team doctor. Now it's his son's turn. Through an affiliate of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, Jeff Orr just returned from La Parva, Chile.

In about two months, the two surgeons will use their expertise in Germany to essentially check the athletes with the Olympic team heading to South Korea in February.

Months later, the men will gear up to move into the new state-of-the-art facility designed to cover every aspect of athletic health from a specific body part to the science of holistic medicine.

In some respects, orthopedics is a medical discipline more about a restoration of excellence rather than a return to normalcy.

“Orthopedics isn't just about getting people through their

day, it's about getting them back to enjoying their lifestyle," Jeff Orr said.