John Lockwood Ochsner: Celebration of life

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John Lockwood Ochsner, MD

Central Message

Celebrating the life of John Lockwood Ochsner, MD: A surgical “giant.”

John Lockwood Ochsner, MD, our esteemed 73rd president of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery (1992-1993) (Figure 1), died in his beloved New Orleans on July 6, 2018, at the age of 91 years. John was the second of 3 surgeon sons of the renowned Dr Alton Ochsner (Figure 2), a founder of the Ochsner Clinic and former Professor and Chairman of the Department of Surgery at Tulane University in New Orleans (1927-1956).¹ Alton Ochsner was the first to associate cigarette smoking as a cause of lung cancer.² He also served as the 27th president of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, making the 2 Ochsners the only father-son legacy that has been bestowed this honor. John Ochsner received both his undergraduate (1948) and medical degrees (1952) from Tulane University. His internship and a year of surgical residency were completed at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1952-1954). After 2 years of military service in Korea as an Air Force physician, he resumed his surgical training at Baylor University College of Medicine under the celebrated surgeons Michael DeBakey (1956-1959) and Denton Cooley (1959-1960) at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston. After his surgical training, John chose to return to New Orleans and to the Clinic, which bore his family name. Because of his many professional and civic accomplishments, he quickly became the “face” of the Ochsner Clinic and of cardiothoracic surgery in New Orleans and the Gulf South. A surgical pioneer, John Ochsner performed many “firsts,” including the first heart transplant in Louisiana in 1970 and many innovative complex congenital heart repairs. He also successfully established and led the first lung transplant program in Louisiana.³ John Ochsner performed more than 12,000 operations in a career that spanned 57 years. Approximately 950 heart transplants have been performed since he initiated this successful program at the Ochsner Clinic. He was Chairman Emeritus of the Department of Surgery at the Ochsner Clinic and a Clinical Professor of Surgery at Tulane. He was named Honorary Alpha Omega Alpha

and received the Outstanding Medical Alumnus Award from Tulane University in 1998. In 2000, he received the Michael E. DeBakey Surgical Award, which is bestowed on the world's most outstanding surgeon as selected by the DeBakey International Surgical Society. This award has only been given 17 times since 1978. John Ochsner's father, Alton, was one of the first to receive this award in 1980. John Ochsner authored more than 350 peer-reviewed surgical publications, book chapters, and films. John was a member of every prestigious surgical Society,

FIGURE 1. John L. Ochsner (1927-2018).

FIGURE 2. Left to right: Alton Ochsner Jr, Alton Ochsner Sr, Mims Ochsner, and John Ochsner.

Association, and Board in America and served as the president or chairman of many. To mention a few, he was president of the Southern Surgical Association, American Association for Vascular Surgery, Southern Association for Vascular Surgery, and New Orleans Surgical Society, and on the Editorial Boards of *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery*, *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*, the *Journal of Vascular Surgery*, and the *Journal of Cardiovascular Surgery*. However, the 3 most prestigious and those of which John was most proud were president of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery (1992-93), chairman of the International Society for Cardiovascular Surgery (1989-91), and chairman of the American Board of Thoracic Surgery (1993-1995). He was the only surgeon to have led all 3.

John Ochsner trained scores of talented and grateful residents in the fields of cardiothoracic, vascular, and general surgery over his career. He once revealed to his son, Lock Ochsner, an accomplished orthopedic surgeon, that one of his greatest rewards was seeing the individuals he trained write articles that contributed to medical

FIGURE 3. P. Michael Mcfadden and John Ochsner at the dedication of the John Ochsner Heart and Vascular Institute.

FIGURE 4. John Ochsner as Rex King of Carnival.

knowledge and advanced the greater good. John treasured loyalty and honesty. The Ochsner Heart and Vascular Institute was renamed the “John Ochsner Heart and Vascular Institute” in 2008 in John Ochsner’s honor to acknowledge his significant contributions in the treatment of heart and vascular diseases (Figure 3).

John Ochsner loved his family and friends, the City of New Orleans, the Ochsner Clinic, the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, Tulane University, the Rex Organization, Carnival, and golf.

In 1990, John Ochsner received the highest honor that is bestowed on a citizen of New Orleans. He was chosen to be

FIGURE 5. The John Ochsner family at a favorite New Orleans restaurant.

Rex King of Carnival (Figure 4). He succeeded his father, Alton, who reigned as Rex 42 years earlier in 1948. John loved golfing at the New Orleans Country Club and other famous courses where he played. He, Dr Norman Shumway, and Dr Denton Cooley were founding members of an exclusive golfing fraternity referred to as the “Senior Cardiac Surgeons Society.” They met annually with other “superstar” cardiac surgeon golf fanatics to compete in a tournament at a select course resort to play golf, socialize, and present papers.

John Ochsner is survived by his loving wife of 64 years, Mary Lou; his son, Dr John Lockwood Ochsner, Jr, and his wife, Lori; Frank Ochsner; and his daughters Joby Ochsner and Dr Katherine Ochsner. He is also survived by his sister Isabel Mann and his granddaughters, Brooke and Kaelin Ochsner (Figure 5).

John Lockwood Ochsner, MD, was the consummate surgeon. He was talented, intelligent, dedicated, compassionate, and in command. He was also engaging, handsome, always impeccably dressed, respectful, and loyal. His charm and the twinkle in his eye lit up every room. In short, John Lockwood Ochsner was the quintessential “southern gentleman” who became one of the “giants” to which he made reference in his American Association for Thoracic Surgery Presidential Address.⁴

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