

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Charles Belleau

COLLECTION: 4700.2622

IDENTIFICATION: retired anesthesiologist; Louisiana State Medical Society member since c. 1961

INTERVIEWER: Trenton James

SERIES: Louisiana State Medical Society

INTERVIEW DATE: July 17, 2015

FOCUS DATES: 1960s-2003

ABSTRACT:

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Introduction; grew up bilingual in rural Saint Landry Parish where everybody spoke French; lived on Bayou Mallet; Belleau was in the first class in Louisiana that went through twelfth grade, rather than eleventh; went to LSU, then graduated from LSU Medical School in 1957; did one-year internship in Shreveport; fellowship at Ochsner Foundation Hospital from 1959-1961; started private practice in Baton Rouge in 1961; during medical school, rented an apartment on Esplanade Avenue with two roommates; Belleau came from a modest family, and worked during school to cover costs; lived in Mercy Hospital his last two years of medical school, working as an extern; loved living in an air-conditioned room; drove an old Plymouth that burned oil like crazy; took the trolley to and from medical school; "At that time of course New Orleans was extremely clean. It was very orderly. There was essentially no crime, and it was just a beautiful city to live in."; mentions professors he remembers; turned down an internship in Houston to get married; saved up money for a year while working at Pinecrest School; choosing to specialize in anesthesiology; training to be an anesthesiologist; got a chance to be an associate in Baton Rouge, so moved his family there; incorporated as the Anesthesiology Group in the late 1960s; worked with Our Lady of the Lake and Baton Rouge General Hospital; at that time, the hospitals didn't directly employ anesthesiologists; surgeons would contact them to schedule anesthesia; Vietnam War led to acute shortage of physicians in Baton Rouge, especially anesthesiologists; Belleau was in college during the Korean War, got a deferment; by the time the Vietnam War started, he was married with two children and got deferred again; selective service administered a test to all college students about their general knowledge, students had to pass to be deferred; names the eight other anesthesiologists he remembers when arriving in Baton Rouge; Belleau was the third or fourth board-certified anesthesiologist in town; also did epidurals and pain practice; Belleau cofounded the open-heart surgery program at Baton Rouge General Hospital; new operating suite at Our Lady of the Lake circa 1961; locations of hospitals; by the time of his

retirement, there were 25 anesthesiologists in his group; adding CRNAs [certified registered nurse anesthesiologists] to the practice; tried to work at Woman's Hospital when it opened, but his group was overextended; process for scheduling surgeries; anesthesiologist group shared the work at two hospitals, Our Lady of the Lake and Baton Rouge General; evolution of his office and office staff; being on call at night; "We did a lot of charity work. I mean a tremendous amount of charity work. Gunshot wounds, stabbings, car wrecks, et cetera."; when Medicare came into effect in 1965, they were initially glad to get some small payment for services they otherwise did for free; in early days, the group owned its own anesthesia equipment and bought its own drugs; handling and storing drugs and supplies; commonly used drugs in his early days of practice; bought drugs through hospital pharmacy; Medicare paid a nonnegotiable flat fee for services; held leadership positions in Future Farmers of America during high school; leadership roles in parish and state medical societies; joined the Louisiana State Medical Society in 1961 or 1962; retired March 1, 2003; offices he held in medical societies; growth of parish medical society; the parish society hired an LSU history professor to write its history; assembling a society directory; served on East Baton Rouge Parish Board of Censors, which investigated complaints against physicians; other leadership positions Belleau held; furor over moving the state medical society office from New Orleans to Jefferson Parish; the New Orleans clinic was in a sketchy neighborhood; medical society's influence on legislature; had office in Jefferson Parish for five years; LSMS bought property in Baton Rouge and moved the medical society headquarters there so it would be close to legislature; in 1990, lobbied the Louisiana legislature to pass a bill establishing the Patient Compensation Fund Oversight Board; importance of the board; Belleau was appointed chairman of the board and worked with others to save the patient compensation fund; all occupations within medical care were involved; elected to LSMS Hall of Fame in 2001 and received the Distinguished Service Award in 2006; served as chief of anesthesiology at both Baton Rouge General and Our Lady of the Lake hospitals; since retiring: "I have essentially devoted all of my time to my family. I didn't devote enough time to my family when I was in practice, so I'm trying to make up for that now."; he has six children, two stepchildren, 14 grandchildren and five step-grandchildren; "So we have a lot of family. As a matter of fact, during holiday time, we sometimes feel lucky they don't all show up."; Belleau is grateful for his health, for the honor of being a physician, and for all the support and encouragement from family and teachers; "I'm just a Louisiana Cajun country boy. I think as a result of the opportunity I was given in this state, I hope that I've been able to give back. Give back to my patients, give back to my community, and give back to my family."

TAPE: 1 (T4578)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 3 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 39 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: 24 digital photos

OTHER MATERIALS: Biographical data form, curriculum vitae, correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: None