

David Carsten Named Centralia College's Distinguished Alumnus

Award: 1977 Graduate of Centralia College Focuses on Empathy to Change Health Care Industry



Dave Hutt

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The Centralia College Foundation has named David Carsten its annual distinguished alumnus.

Carsten, a 1977 graduate of Centralia College, owns a dental practice called Pacific Dental Anesthesia in Vancouver, and specializes in compassionate mobile anesthesia. Julie Johnson, director of donors and alumni relations for the foundation, said the board looks for someone who is committed to strengthening their community while providing excellence in their profession. The award has been handed out since 1978, and many recipients have received national or international accomplishments, but the ultimate goal is to select someone who makes a difference in their community and profession.

The foundation was impressed with Carsten's accomplishments and his connection to the college. Carsten's father was once a dean of administration. As a young boy, Carsten spent a lot of time on campus.

"I was surprised," Carsten said of the designation. "It was especially nice since I really grew up on the Centralia College campus ... My family was very connected to the college."

Carsten graduated from Centralia High School and later went on to complete his associate's degree in science. He attended Washington State University and received a degree in biochemistry. Later, he obtained a degree in dentistry at the University of Washington.

He began practicing in Dayton, a small town located approximately 30 miles north of Walla Walla. He then began working at a practice in Battle Ground for 19 years while teaching at the Oregon Health Sciences University.

Carsten went on to complete an anesthesia residency at Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn, a level one trauma center. He then returned to Vancouver and began his mobile service. The dentist and anesthesiologist travels to different dental practices and treats fearful adults and children, many of whom have a disability and are not able to have dental work done without sedation.

He said the career has been interesting and rewarding.

Throughout his experiences, Carsten has strongly focused on empathy as a key factor to his work and has held study clubs and lectures on the matter.

Recently, he teamed up with Geshila Tashi Larhampa Gyatso, a Tibetan Buddhist monk, and has taught health care providers the importance of empathy and mindfulness in practice. Most recently the pair taught at the Salmon Creek Legacy Hospital.

"The important message regarding empathy is that the need for it is universal," Carsten said. "Understanding and perspective taking is critical for survival on this planet."

The award will be presented to Carsten on Friday, June 12, at an invite-only award luncheon. The dentist will attend a faculty and staff breakfast in the morning, receive a tour of the campus and will also be a speaker at the commencement ceremony.

Johnson said the award was important for three different reasons: to show current students the success of the college's past graduates, to recognize alumni for the important accomplishments they have made in their communities, and to show the community at large what students from the college are capable of doing.