

Alfred B. Swanson, MD, FACS

16 April 1923 – 27 April 2016

It is probably fair to state that without the efforts of Al Swanson, the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (IFSSH) would not exist. Dr. Swanson, who died at the age of 93 years on April 27, 2016, was not only one of the principal founders of the IFSSH, but because of his close relationship with many international colleagues and trainees and the respect they held for him, was the one driving force to the continued success of The Federation. Even though the IFSSH established its charter in 1966, the first Congress was not held until 1980 in Rotterdam and was organized by Al Swanson and Jacques van der Meulen of The Netherlands.

Dr. Swanson served as the Secretary General of the IFSSH from 1977-1980, and was the only President of seventeen to serve two terms. He then continued to serve the IFSSH as Historian from 1990-2003. Because of his dedicated leadership and many contributions to the IFSSH, a "Swanson Lectureship", the keynote address for the triennial Congress, was established in 2007 in his honor. He was also recognized by the Federation in 1995 as a Pioneer in Hand Surgery.

Al Swanson was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin on April 16, 1923. He received his undergraduate and medical school education at the University of Illinois, and his orthopaedic training at the Universities of Illinois, Northwestern, and Indiana. He became the Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery and Director of the Orthopaedic Surgery Residency of Blodgett Memorial Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan from 1954-1979. He also was the founding Director of the Orthopaedic Research and Hand Fellowship at Blodgett Hospital from 1962-2001. A consummate educator, he

trained 97 hand surgery fellows from 32 countries.

Dr. Swanson served as President of the American Society for Surgery and authored more than 300 scientific articles and one book. He was recognized for his treatment of children with congenital anomalies, poliomyelitis and cerebral palsy. He established practical and standard classifications for congenital limb anomalies as well as physical impairment ratings. Perhaps his greatest contribution was the development



of silicone flexible implants for the small joints in the hands of arthritic patients. His silicone implants have served as the gold standard for more than 50 years as no other implants have been proven to outperform them in pain relief, function, and longevity. He was presented national humanitarian awards and recognized for his voluntary work in aiding and training hand surgeons and establishing polio vaccination programs in other countries such as Vietnam and Peru.

During his later years, he remained active by promoting environmental awareness, tree protection, and planting on a worldwide basis.

Al was always very proud of his family – his children Eric, Miles and Karin and their children. He was especially proud and appreciative of his wife, Dr. Genevieve de Groot Swanson, who together made a strong team, serving humanity in many different and long-lasting ways. A giant in our profession has fallen, but his significant contributions will carry us for many future decades..

James R. Urbaniak