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FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

A Tribute to Tom Mayer

Nonprofit associations like the North American Spine Society (NASS) are unique in that the members both benefit from the activities and products of the society and produce them as well. Whether it is an article for a journal, a session at an annual meeting or a patient fact sheet, all of the products and services offered by NASS come largely from the efforts of its membership. Even with staff facilitation, nothing would be possible without the time and talent of many member volunteers. It is also the extensive involvement and efforts of key people throughout NASS' existence that has critically supported its thriving growth and development into a preeminent spine society.

In truth, if NASS is conceived as a fabric made of the interwoven endeavors of human lives – a few of the threads of this fabric are certainly made of steel. We have been fortunate that such steel-fibered individuals who carry a rare combination of talents, choose to selflessly work within many important organizational levels of NASS and to volunteer for the benefit of the society and ultimately the spine field.

Tom Mayer, who is completing his fifth year as Editor-in-Chief of *The Spine Journal*, is such an individual. Dr. Mayer served as President of NASS in 1999, during a tumultuous time in NASS history. His term coincided both with the end of this century and the dawn of a new era for this society. NASS had just lived through the problematic pedicle screw

era of the mid '90s, steadily guided by Jeff Saal and David Fardon, among others. With that behind us, Steve Garfin refocused NASS' resources on meeting members' needs; we were able to reprioritize some of NASS' goals and get back on track.

As NASS prepared itself for the new millennium, the right man was at the helm. Even before he served as President, Tom had been to more NASS board meetings than coffee. He had not only been a longtime contributor, but a visionary thinker for NASS. As treasurer of the society, he carefully monitored investments that bolstered NASS' fiscal strength. His efforts, often behind the scenes, helped establish NASS as a truly great force in the spine care field.

Some vital developments at NASS have required a steward. Tom Mayer took on that guardian role in more than a few areas and in the name of all its members when he worked for years on several difficult and labor-intensive projects, including clinical guidelines and the AMA discussions on evaluation of permanent impairment. NASS has clearly developed into an energetic advocate society that vigorously addresses public and member education in spine, in no small measure, a direct result of Tom's leadership and labor. In fact the seeds of our advocacy efforts were sown at a strategic planning session held during Dr. Mayer's presidency.

Tom is also an amazing strategist; he sees how things are connected, or should be connected, often well before others are



Tom Mayer, MD

aware that a link or a communication level exists. During his term as president, Tom devised and implemented a system by which all NASS committees are routinely scrutinized and formal rotation schedules are set. Now, it is clear to all what is expected of them and for how long, and not only are our committees more productive as a result, I believe your current president is as well. The system also serves to keep new members involved and enthused in NASS projects, avoiding volunteer burn-out while constantly infusing NASS with new talent.

During his tenure as president and with the assistance of David Fardon and Neil Kahanovitz, Tom started to ponder what NASS needed to do to continue its evolution and better meet the needs of spine care providers. As a result of those discussions, then-president Neil Kahanovitz orchestrated the development of *The Spine Journal* in early 2000. It was vital to find an Editor-in-Chief with proven leadership ability, a strategic thinker, someone who could tackle a very tough undertaking and be creative and entrepreneurial enough to make a fledgling effort successful. The NASS leadership did not have to look far. In April of 2000, Tom Mayer was named

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inaugural Editor-in-Chief of *The Spine Journal*.

No one deserves more praise than Tom for his exemplary accomplishments and stellar performance as Editor-in-Chief of *The Spine Journal*. He took on *The Spine Journal* as a personal mission and established a rigorous peer review process that set the highest standards. And his efforts were rewarded with conditional acceptance by Index Medicus after only two years of publication. With continued and unflagging enthusiasm, he assembled a world-class network of national and international reviewers. Every article that is published in *TSJ* is rigorously reviewed by expert advisory and associate editors as well as Deputy Editors and the Editor-in-Chief. Each of these members of the editorial board have earned the thanks and appreciation of the NASS Board and the entire NASS member-

ship. Through Tom's dogged dedication, the journal is now on a regular publishing schedule with a backlog of quality manuscripts in review. And providential for all of us, his unrelenting commitment to the multidisciplinary perspective championed by NASS has made *The Spine Journal* unique in the field.

We've come a long way thanks to your vision, leadership and hustle, Tom. Though your term as Editor-in-Chief will soon be up, your legacy will live on. It is my pleasure to announce that every future issue of *The Spine Journal* will have a special dedication on the inside cover naming Tom Mayer as Editor-in-Chief Emeritus – thereby holding a special place of honor in the society's ongoing history. Congratulations and thank you, Tom!