



Community Volunteer Spotlight: Dr. Mai Tram Nguyen

Nguyen

How did you first become associated with the Greater Houston Dental Society? Were you actively looking for volunteer opportunities at the time?

While a student at UT School of Dentistry-Houston, I had presented a table clinic for the Star of the South Dental Meeting. It was then that I learned about the wonderful events and opportunities that the GHDS organized to help students become better people and dentists. I noticed how GHDS provided resources for us to network within the community and had an immense positive impact on the Houston community. Dental school taught me to embrace this exciting profession, and the GHDS inspired me to resume my passion to contribute to a cause that I care deeply about both personally and professionally. After graduation, being a member of the GHDS helped turn that opportunity into a reality. I have been volunteering on behalf of the GHDS and the Vietnamese community ever since then.

What is it about Greater Houston Dental Society's mission that appeals to you personally?

GHDS's mission emphasizes professional development through community service. For me, dental community service is paramount. Some communities of Houston lack access to affordable dental care. As someone with the ability to ameliorate this problem, even treating one patient can make a big impact. Additionally, the GHDS presents a unique volunteer combination, so that I can capitalize on my profession to serve the community while building camaraderie within the network of Houston Dentists. The Give Kids A Smile Day capitalizes on my Pediatric Dentistry profession and allows me to volunteer alongside some of the best dentists in the city. Nothing beats the joy I experienced through the GHDS on these kinds of days. Something else to note is the impact these opportunities have on me. Veterans Smile Day has allowed me to honor the veterans who served our country, something very meaningful to me. Further-

We are pleased to spotlight Dr. Mai Tram Nguyen, a past chairman and current member and volunteer of our Dental Health Committee. In addition to these roles, Dr. Nguyen has been instrumental in serving the public's oral health needs and education as officers of both the Asian American Dental Society and Association of Vietnamese American Dentists helping to coordinate past programs such as Give Kids A Smile and Veterans Smile Day. Dr. Nguyen discusses these experiences in the following article.

more, this provided me with a unique opportunity to help honor forgotten South Vietnamese Veterans, like my father. Through Veterans Smile Day, the GHDS allowed me to honor the Veterans in a very profound and personal way. The GHDS has a plethora of other opportunities that are just as meaningful to a variety of individuals, patient or doctor. Lastly, the GHDS gives me the opportunity to be with my colleagues, share many valuable ideologies, goals, and learn about teamwork. The values of the GHDS—collaboration to discuss how to improve dentistry and the community—give me a sense of satisfaction, and appreciation for the people of Houston and my fellow dentists.

How has volunteer work had an impact on your life?

I believe that my passion for community service started at a young age when I was old enough to memorialize my father's contributions to our wounded warriors. A military man himself, my father supported the veterans, servicemen and women, and the charities focused on everything from veterans' families' assistance to more targeted organizations. Volunteering is a part of our family tradition. For example, in my undergraduate years, I organized a fundraiser through creative events to promote the Vietnamese culture. I learned to appreciate the Vietnamese American culture more and got more involved with a group of outstanding young adults while volunteering with the Vietnamese Culture and Science Association, Saigon Houston Radio, and the Association of Vietnamese American Dentists for the last 20 years. Being involved in the GHDS, especially within the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, provided me the unique advantage of seeing how people of various backgrounds create new solutions in the midst of change. I enjoy having a positive impact on the community through the work I have done with the GHDS. Volunteering has increased my self-confidence, and helped me manage my stress, while expanding my connections. While volunteering may take many shapes and forms, it always has a positive impact on the lives of everyone involved.

What advice would you give to those considering volunteering their time or donating to the Greater Houston Dental Society?

Just do it! Do not think twice about it. Something that my children, ages 21 and 23, always say is "Full Send." According to them, it means to just do it wholeheartedly. To those considering volunteering their time or donating to the GHDS, I tell you, "Full Send." Every minute you spend

volunteering can impact someone for many years to come. I have never regretted a time I volunteered. Every opportunity that you get—even those not related to dentistry—to help someone else is an opportunity worth pursuing. Volunteering is the heart and soul of giving back to the community. The GHDS volunteering mission aligns with both my professional and personal objectives, and they can volunteer to accomplish multiple goals at the same time. For those interested in volunteering or donating to the GHDS, I would say SIGN-UP, REACH OUT, HAVE FUN and BE COMMITTED!

Do you have any final comments for the GHDS readership?

Be involved and stay involved! Not only are you connected with so many special and talented individuals, but you feel a sense of unity amongst all of the members. Dentistry can be tough over the course of 40+ years—mentally, physically, and emotionally. However, being a participant in a group like the GHDS lets you feel less alone. It allows you to be a part of something bigger than yourself and can help you grow in ways that you may have never imagined, in and out of the office. If you're a dental student, a young dentist, or even have been practicing dentistry for 30+ years, the GHDS family will ALWAYS be there for motivation and guidance. The GHDS can provide you all the stepping stones needed for a long, successful, and happy career in dentistry. If you pour into this community and put time and effort into it, it can truly change your life, as it has mine.

Often times, we fixate on national events, but locally is where your effort can really make a difference! Whether it be big or small, whatever impact that you can have on your community can make a difference in so many lives for years to come. At a crucial time for all of those in healthcare, now more than ever we need to come together as dentists. Get involved (or more involved) with GHDS today!

It is an honor to be spotlighted, and I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the GHDS and its community. I would like to thank all my fellow dentists that have worked with me in the past, I could not have gone this far without every single one of you. Lastly, my family, especially my daughter, Paulina and my son, Alan for always supporting me and loving me unconditionally.