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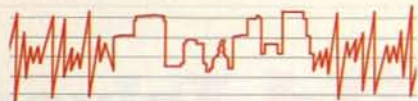
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## MEDICINE In Atlanta

# Atlanta's Dentist To The Stars

*Art, dedication and family tradition  
have made Ronald Goldstein one of the  
world's best-known dentists.*

*By David Nordan*

*Photography By Alan Weiner*

**D**r. Ronald Goldstein, as usual, is holding forth on some particular point about the passion of his life, the art and practice of esthetic dentistry — “That’s with an e,” he says — when his eye falls to the celebrity on the cover of a magazine he has been absently tapping with his finger for emphasis. It is the defrocked 1984 Miss America, Vanessa Williams, smiling broadly from the page.

His monologue neither falters nor changes in pitch as he stares at the seemingly flawless face of the beautiful young woman, apparently noticing it for the first time, and changes directions completely. “Look at that cap,” he says, “look at how it sticks out. She has tetracycline stain, probably from treatment for some infection as a child, and they stick a perfectly white cap smack in the middle of her smile.”

“Poor Vanessa,” he adds with a note of sadness in the shake of his head, “with all her troubles and she’s got a terrible cap.” That observation made, Goldstein returns to his otherwise unrelated discourse on dentistry with never a flap in his sail.

It’s a habit the 52-year-old Atlanta dentist can’t seem to break. “I try to look

into people’s eyes,” he confesses, “but I always end up focusing on their mouths.”

He will show you behavior studies that prove this is where most people focus, and receive their initial, and sometimes lasting, impression of a fellow human. Therefore, he argues, it is the mouth, not the eyes, which is the most important visual feature of the face. And he has built his professional life around the conclusion that a person’s teeth can profoundly affect almost every aspect of his or her condition — from success in career and social life to the vision of his or her own destiny.

It is this faith, combined with a sometimes frustrated creative bent — “I didn’t want to be a dentist. I wanted to be a writer” — tempered by a quest for perfection and, one suspects, a genuine fondness for people instilled in him by his late father, Dr. Irving Goldstein, himself a legendary dentist and community leader for 50 years in Atlanta, which has established Ron Goldstein as probably the best-known esthetic dentist in the country. Perhaps even the world.

He maintains a sizable practice with two partners, Drs. Ron Fineman and David Garber, in a maze of plushly dec-



orated offices in his West Paces Ferry clinic. He conducts as many as 50 lectures and seminars all over the globe each year. He holds teaching positions at several major universities around the country, including Boston University, the Medical College of Georgia and Emory University, where he was responsible for establishing the nation’s first undergraduate program in esthetic dentistry.

Goldstein also wrote the first dental textbook on the subject — *Esthetics in Dentistry* — which has sold more than 20,000 copies in six languages. Two years ago he published a second book, *Change Your Smile*, which was designed for consumers but which has received solid recognition from his professional peers. It has already sold more than 25,000 copies and is in the process of being updated for another printing.

Goldstein has been instrumental in research and testing of new composite materials — which he believes will eventually replace capping — for use in cos-



metic dentistry. He also has invented several dental instruments and serves as a consultant to manufacturers.

But the aspect of Goldstein's career which has brought him out of the closed professional world of dentistry, where he has received a mountain of accolades from some colleagues, and some criticism from others who are more traditional minded, has been his work with celebrities and his determination to write — perhaps as much to fulfill a lifelong compulsion as to pave the way for what he believes will be the dentistry of the future.

Raised in the courtly atmosphere of the northside Atlanta of the 1940s and '50s by a gentle yet exacting patriarch of a father, Goldstein at times seems contradictory in his manner and approach to life. In appearance he is every inch the mild-mannered and understanding family dentist, tall and slender — even though he constantly worries about his weight — his thinning hair and wire-rimmed glasses

frame a soft face and humorous manner which seem designed to inspire confidence.

He is an easy, sometimes even shy, conversationalist who does not tend to overwhelm, remarkably, even when he is talking about his favorite subject — dentistry. What often seems like recalcitrance or confusion takes on its true meaning when one realizes he is racing toward a mental conclusion he has already zeroed in on as just another object to be whittled down to perfection.

His mania for perfection has led him into a profound appreciation of the ballet and gourmet cooking, but, beyond that, says Goldstein, "I love beauty. Beauty and life. I enjoy looking at trees and flowers perhaps more than most people, although there's never enough time."

Goldstein also is something of a movie fanatic, and the end of a long trip out of town will usually find him unwinding with one of the three movie channels on



*Patients Phyllis Diller and Pat Paulsen show their new smiles.*

his cable TV hookup. "I like comedy and movies that make me cry," he confesses. "And I've seen every James Bond film ever made."

But Ron Goldstein insists that the highlight of his year comes when he attends an annual banquet where the "Irving Goldstein Award" is presented for

outstanding achievement by the handicapped. The award was created in honor of his father's efforts — carried on later by Ron — in setting up the Governor's Council for Handicapped People in the late 1950s.

He is very much the product of his father's hand and he at times seems a little pained to bring the esthetic part of his nature in line with the necessity to achieve and serve and be recognized, fostered in him by the gregarious and much beloved Irving Goldstein. "I don't do it for the money," he says. "My family is well-off. I do it for the achievement."

Sitting across a glass dining room table in his large utilitarian-contemporary home in north Atlanta, with an attack-trained Doberman pinscher named Alexis nosing him for attention, Goldstein muses over the effect his father's attitude about achievement had on him and the way he might have passed it along to his own four children — all of whom seem destined for careers in dentistry or medicine.

His wife Judy — a former Northside High sweetheart — nods agreement as he talks of the demanding nature of his work and the time it took away from his growing family.

"I checked into a hotel to write my textbook," he says. "I just couldn't do it at home. I explained this to the kids, and they said 'Don't worry, Dad. Just do what you have to do then come on home.'" The spacious Goldstein house, laid out in modern, split-level style designed for the large family, is empty now. But the Goldsteins seem hopeful of a new type of homecoming. With two, possibly three of the children moving towards dental careers, he anticipates that his practice will be further enlarged by the family name.

Goldstein's approach is something akin to the holistic school of medicine. Rather than simply addressing the mouth and

teeth as a separate part of the face, he studies a patient with the eye of a portrait painter about to begin work on a canvas. He considers such things as facial proportions, smile lines, age, and even mental state, before deciding upon his total approach.

An accomplished amateur photographer — another outlet for his esthetic leanings — he takes before and after pictures of almost every job and maintains a gallery of patients who have come to him with unattractive teeth and a depressed attitude about themselves and have left looking somewhat reborn, both in smile and spirit.

Some of the faces in his gallery are of well-known celebrities. He guards these closely; many, particularly performers and politicians, are extremely sensitive about having availed themselves of his services. But those who have given him permission to use their case studies in his writings and lectures include performers Phyllis Diller, Pat Paulsen, Peter Lupus of "Mission Impossible" fame, athletes Fran Tarkenton and Henry Aaron, Heloise, the writer, and a good many local celebrities and political figures.

A particularly close friendship developed from his work on Diller. He met the comedian on a trans-Atlantic flight several years ago and after some discussion of Goldstein's work — prompted no doubt by his propensity for staring with furrowed brow at a person's mouth — Diller decided she could use his services. He pulled a special team together and after 10 hours of intensive work earned her undying devotion. Diller gleefully wrote the introduction to his *Change Your Smile* book.

The teamwork approach is another key to Goldstein's philosophy of dentistry. Before embarking on the strictly esthetic aspects of treatment, he is likely to consult an oral surgeon, a periodontist (gum

specialist) and an orthodontist — usually his uncle Marvin Goldstein, also one of the most distinguished practitioners of his specialty in the country, whose offices are downstairs in the same building. He may even bring in a plastic surgeon or bone specialist, and, as a final touch, perhaps a cosmetologist or hair stylist. It is the final, total product which interests Goldstein and no detail escapes his eye.

On a given day, the 13 examining rooms tucked away off the winding corridors of his clinic may be filled with patients, most of them well-heeled, who have flown from Los Angeles, Miami, New York, or any number of foreign countries specifically to avail themselves of his services. He and his partners recently converted a section of his building into a large conference room where he periodically assembles the 28 people on his staff to hear some visiting lecturer he has pulled in. The technicians, hygienists, assistants and other specialists in his office are nearly all women. They keep up a sort of uniform of the day, and each day all will be dressed in essentially the same color of slacks and blouse or sweater, pink on Monday, blue on Tuesday and so forth.

Despite all this, there is nothing of the pretentious about either Goldstein the man or Goldstein the professional or about the atmosphere of his clinic, where the mood is generally lighthearted and casual. These details more likely come from Goldstein's mania for perfection and balance.

But there is something about the soft-spoken native Atlantan which leads to the suspicion that he really is motivated by more than the rewards of wealth and recognition his dedication to perfection have brought him. He seems genuinely to care about people and the better life he believes his efforts can bring them. Beyond that, there is the ethic of self-achievement, the idea that one owes it to oneself to be the best one can and do the best one can, whatever the task.

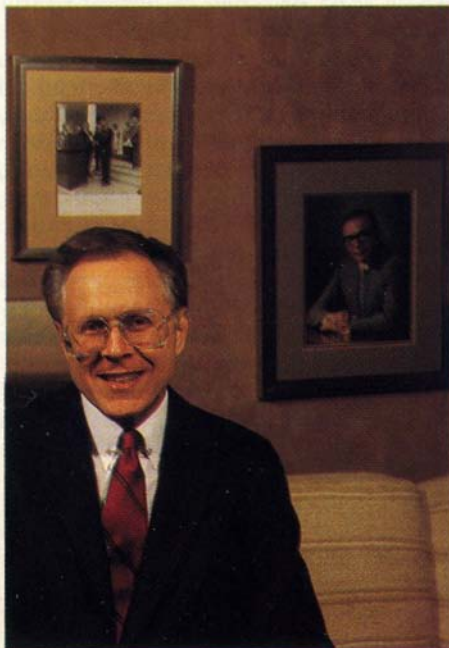
To look for roots of both concepts, one only has to look at the 20th-century history of the Atlanta Goldsteins, unquestionably one of the city's most remarkable families and a successful personification of the dream America held for the 19th-century European immigrant.

In the living room of Ron Goldstein's home hangs a big faded photograph of an elderly man in the cap and long beard of the Jewish scholar. He is leaning over and tracing his finger along the text of a large book, perhaps the Torah. This is great-grandfather Samuel who came to Atlanta from Russia near the turn of the century.

He was followed a few years later by his son Avrum Meyer Goldstein, who brought his wife and young son Irving, Ron's father who was born in Poland in 1905. Another son, Marvin, and four

*/Continued on page 96*

*Grandfather Goldstein (right) fathered a dental dynasty: sons Irving (below left) and Marvin and grandson Ron became prominent Atlanta dentists.*



# BENT

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Epicurian Award

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Atlanta Wine Festival  
Wine List Gold Medal  
1982-1983-1984

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Guest Quarters Best of  
Atlanta Award 1982-1984

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Atlanta Magazine Best of  
Atlanta Award 1982-1984

## DENTIST/*from page 64*

daughters would be born in this country.

It was son Irving who blossomed in the new life in the new world. After graduating from Boy's High (now Grady High) he enrolled in the Atlanta Dental College in 1922. The school was later to be integrated into the Emory University complex, and he graduated from Emory Dental School in 1926.

Atlanta Rabbi Harry H. Epstein says Irving Goldstein became "more than just a dentist. He was a man who elicited confidence from everyone who came into contact with him. There was no activity in which he was not involved. His whole life was devoted to service."

A list of his professional and civic activities from an old resumé bares out Epstein's observations. Typed in single space, they cover three full pages and perhaps should culminate with a ceremony in the hills of Judea last summer when some 25 members of his family, including son Ron and brother Marvin, dedicated to his memory a chair in dental research which they had provided at the Hebrew University School of Dental Medicine.

Irving Goldstein had been a moving force in establishing the school in Israel in 1944-45 as international president of Alpha Omega, an honorary society of Jewish dentists. His younger brother Marvin, in the same position, had dedicated it from the same spot in 1946.

Ron Goldstein was also to become international president of Alpha Omega, and the Goldsteins are the only family who have ever had three members as head of that prestigious 20,000-member organization.

Shortly after beginning practice in Atlanta, Irving Goldstein founded the Ben Massell Dental Clinic, named after an Atlanta developer who built many of the city's first modern structures and who provided much of the money to open the facility to provide dental care for indigents. Today the Massell Clinic, presided over by Marvin Goldstein since the death of his brother in 1979, uses the services of about 100 volunteer dentists in Atlanta to treat some 7,000 indigent patients a year.

It was Irving Goldstein who edged his 12-years-junior brother Marvin into dentistry. Now perhaps the most prominent orthodontist in the city and nationally recognized, Marvin, like Ron, is a clinical professor at Georgia Medical College and a special lecturer at Emory. Irving also is responsible for a cousin, Ted Levitas, brother of former Fourth District Congressman Elliott Levitas, entering the profession. The mantle continues to be passed with Goldstein's children.

Son Cary, 28, an Emory dentist, is finishing graduate school with a specialty in prothodontics at the University of Southern California; daughter Cathy, 25, will graduate from Emory Dental School next spring; son Richard, 23, is a first-year

medical student at Emory; and son Kenny, 22, graduates in June from the University of Georgia and has applied for admission to the Medical College School of Dentistry.

If ever there was a dynasty of dentistry, the Goldsteins would have to qualify.

But they all trace their drive and inclinations to the presence of Irving Goldstein in their lives. Apparently many Atlantans feel almost as inspired. He was a close friend and confidante to the late Mayor William B. Hartsfield, whose office was adjacent to his in the Grant Building, and of Mayor Ivan Allen.

In 1962, Allen had embarked on a mission to lure professional sports teams to Atlanta and approached Irving Goldstein with the complaint that it would be impossible without at least one integrated hotel in the city. With that, Goldstein opened the Peachtree Manor, which he owned with his family, to all races, and it became the first integrated hotel in Atlanta. Some friends in that era were critical and asked him why he did it. "Because it was the right thing to do," he responded.

Although the glitter of his specialty in esthetic dentistry might tend to obscure it, "doing the right thing" appears to have been very much a part of Ronald Goldstein's life as well.

Among the earliest of a host of newspaper clippings in his massive stack of scrapbooks are accounts of young Ron, fresh out of Emory Dental School and in practice with his father, as a leading light, as a committee chairman for the Georgia Jaycees, in a statewide, then national, effort to improve care and facilities for the mentally ill and retarded.

He also was one of the most outspoken advocates of fluoridating Atlanta's water system, and a leader in a cause which he inherited from his father, the hiring of the physically handicapped.

Throughout, he practices his penchant for writing, working as a contributor for every publication he could come into contact with, including his Northside High School paper, the campus publication at the University of Michigan, where he attended undergraduate school, and the *Emory Wheel*.

He seems to have brought his bent for creativity together with dentistry in his decision to specialize in esthetics.

His father, he says, had urged him to specialize, and he concurred with the decision to take that approach with esthetics. "But there is no such specialty as that," Dr. Irving protested.

"Then we'll make it one," Dr. Ron responded.

He often says aloud, as he looks across his office desk at the gentle features of his father in a picture hanging on an opposite wall, that "I wish he could be here to see what we've been able to accomplish."

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