The Nelson Years

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center
School of Pharmacy
West Texans know they occupy a part of the country considered by many to be dusty, dry and vegetation challenged. Perhaps that’s why they are quick to point out the natural beauty and unpredictable colors produced by the prairie sunrises and sunsets they see every day.

Arthur Nelson, Ph.D., R.Ph., arrived in the Texas Panhandle for the first time in 1993. He had just flown in from Pocatello, Idaho, where he was dean of the Idaho State University College of Pharmacy. As he took in the topography, or lack thereof, that marks the ride from Amarillo’s airport into the city, he surely had no idea there were nearly two decades of those West Texas sunrises in his future.

“Idaho was a beautiful, mountainous state and our home was on the side of a mountain,” Nelson says. “My first impression of West Texas was flat and windy. But the people I met made all the terrain and climate less important. I met people who were committed and extremely friendly. I have found in all the places I have lived that it is really the people that make the community a great place to live.”

THE BIG GAMBLE

Idaho State was the first pharmacy school not associated with a health sciences center to convert to an all-Pharm.D. program, and although Nelson was generally pleased with the program, he had been kicking the tires on opportunities and challenges available at other schools. When he agreed to come to West Texas, his intention was to discuss taking the founding dean’s position at the newly planned Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Pharmacy in Amarillo. It was a discussion he didn’t necessarily think would lead to a change of address.

Earlier that year, Nelson had interviewed for the dean’s position at Auburn University’s Harrison School of Pharmacy. He liked the atmosphere at the school and within the surrounding community, but he turned down their initial offer.

“The university was not prepared to either financially support a good pharmacy school or make the transition to an all-Pharm.D. program,” Nelson recalls. “They sweetened the offer for me personally, but a community pharmacist who was also a regent refused to even consider the Pharm.D. degree, so I didn’t accept their second offer either.”

Dr. Jack Cole, a former dean of pharmacy and provost for the University of Arizona, heard about Nelson’s possible interest in changing jobs and about his visit to Auburn. At the time, Cole was serving as a consultant for the search committee tasked with hiring a founding dean for TTUHSC’s pharmacy school. Cole contacted Nelson to see if he had any interest in coming to West Texas to start a new pharmacy school that would open as a Pharm.D. program.

“Jack told me TTUHSC wanted a significant program and was seeking a dean that would make it happen. I said I wouldn’t be interested because they were putting the school in Amarillo rather than the home campus in Lubbock where all the other deans and schools were located. I told him, ‘If they were interested in a quality program then they would base it in Lubbock.’ He assured me the Amarillo-area community was 100 percent behind supporting the development of the new pharmacy school and asked if I would have dinner with him if he flew to Pocatello to talk about the position. I agreed — never turn down a free meal — and Jack’s story of the community and the university’s support, even on the regional campus, convinced me to at least come and take a look.”

Nelson remained skeptical of the TTUHSC situation even as he agreed to hear the school’s pitch. New pharmacy schools were all but unheard of in the mid-1990s. In fact, there had only
been two new pharmacy schools in the country since the 1950s and they were both opened at private universities. When he arrived in Amarillo, however, he was met at the airport by Sen. Teel Bivins and Dr. Lee Taylor, regional dean for the TTUHSC School of Medicine.

“The reluctance I felt about the level of support for the new program began to immediately dissipate,” Nelson says. “Before I left to return home, the idea of moving to Amarillo to start a new pharmacy school was becoming an interesting challenge that I felt would be worth the gamble. All I had to do was convince my family that West Texas was going to be our new home. Fortunately, at that time, I never thought it would be for 18-plus years.”

ROLLING UP THE SLEEVES

When the 73rd Texas Legislature established the TTUHSC School of Pharmacy in 1993 and required it to be placed in Amarillo, it also specified that no state funds could be used in the school’s construction. That meant one of Nelson’s first orders of business when he was officially hired as founding dean in 1994 was to help TTUHSC secure donations to transform a dusty parcel of Texas Panhandle prairie into a 102,000-square-foot facility for training future pharmacists.

Over the next year or so, more than $13 million was raised from the Amarillo Economic Development Corporation, the Amarillo Hospital District and a slew of private donors. Construction began with a groundbreaking ceremony in March 1995 on land donated by the Harrington Regional Medical Center. The process afforded Nelson a chance to dabble in architecture and he relished the opportunity.

“My mom was a registered nurse and her influence caused me to look for a career in the health professions,” Nelson says. “I took an aptitude test my senior year in high school and pharmacy was one of the careers that scored high. I spent a couple of days observing in a friend’s father’s store and thought that it would indeed be good for me. Then when I got to graduate school and spent some time reading literature about the validity of these aptitude tests for making career choices, I found that the one for pharmacy was really bad. So maybe I made the wrong choice. But my second choice was architect and I did get to design a number of pharmacy buildings over my career.”

Nelson also had to start putting together a staff and faculty for the new school. The first person he hired was Sharon Mears, who would serve as his administrative assistant until her retirement in January 2012. Mears has fond memories of those early days, which she describes as charmingly chaotic.

“While the new building was being constructed, our offices were at the School of Medicine and they were very cramped quarters,” Mears recounts. “As more office staff and faculty were hired we acquired a little bigger space from the School of Medicine for the dean and staff. The faculty offices were in the basement of Northwest Texas Hospital and also at Parkwest Office Park, so we were pretty scattered.”

Thanks to cooperation from the local weathermen, construction of the new building at 1300 S. Coulter St. was generally free of delays. However, once the building opened and the task of preparing for the first students was under way, Mother Nature became the building’s toughest inspector.

“The luck of West Texas,” Nelson recalls. “During construction, it didn’t rain for about 18 months so they couldn’t check for building leaks. When it finally rained after we moved in, the
building leaked at all the points on the first floor and where the second through fourth floors joined."

Nelson also recalls a Valentine's Day scare just months before the building was scheduled to open.

“The fire department called my home and said I had better get down there because my new pharmacy building was burning down,” Nelson says with a laugh. “As it turned out, the workers were putting on the hot tar for the roof and they thought it had cooled sufficiently to leave for the day. The tar had only caught some trash on fire, but it looked like the whole building would burn down,”

Mears says leaks and fires weren’t the only adventures that came with the SOP’s new home.

“A new building does not happen without problems and building on the edge of the High Plains prairie meant we attracted all kinds of critters, including snakes in the basement,” Mears says with a shudder. “The temperature in the building was about 104 degrees on the fourth floor and 30 degrees on the first floor, so everyone was either bringing a fan or a heater to work. Eventually though, everything was pretty much normal and we were able to return to our daily routine of preparing for the new students.”

For Nelson, that meant he could continue working on his vision of how the pharmacy school should be put together inside its newly constructed walls. In addition to establishing an all-Pharm.D. program, he had successfully negotiated several other important issues with TTUHSC President Robert Lawless and Executive Vice President Dr. Bernie Mittemeyer. First, after the professional program was under way, the school would add a graduate program and a residency program. Second, the school would place an emphasis on preparing its Pharm.D. graduates for clinical pharmacy practice.

“I also stressed that the SOP needed to establish a Pharmacy Income Plan comparable to that of the School of Medicine to engage all our clinical faculty in direct patient care,” Nelson says. “If we were going to emphasize clinical pharmacy training, our faculty had to model what they were teaching. This concept is foundational for Ph.D. programs; faculty members without active research programs generally don’t prepare quality Ph.D. graduates. The same is true for clinical programs and faculty.”

Nelson was determined to build a program that armed students with the latest technologies and developed pharmacists with effective communications and presentation skills. All students were required to purchase laptops and the program was built with technology serving as the foundation for effective and efficient instruction and learning.

“I was also committed to students having direct patient engagement in all four years, starting almost from their first day,” Nelson stresses. “The vision was to have a cutting-edge, ability-focused curriculum; a comprehensive school with Pharm.D., Ph.D. and residency programs; high-impact basic and applied research; and clinical faculty practice from the beginning. I just never thought we would become the triple threat we are with education, research and practice nor that we would eventually be spread across four distant campuses.”

To move his vision from paper to reality, Nelson and the school had to overcome an extreme shortage of advanced clinical practitioners in West Texas. When he arrived there were only six Pharm.D. practitioners from Amarillo to El Paso and from the New Mexico border to Fort Worth. Fortunately for the new school, five of those practitioners worked in Amarillo: four at the Thomas E. Creek VA Medical Center and another at what is now the Baptist St. Anthony’s Health System.
“That reality caused me to re-think how we would build our program,” Nelson explains. “Without clinical practitioners employed in the hospitals, I realized either the plans for the intensity of clinical education across all four years had to be significantly reduced or the pharmacy school would have to develop faculty practice plans like the medical school to be able to provide the preceptors required to achieve our initial goals of having a leading clinical education program.”

**IF THEY COME, IT CAN BE BUILT**

Almost from the moment he agreed to help TTUHSC start its pharmacy school, Nelson was warned that his chances of recruiting good faculty to West Texas rested somewhere between slim and none, and slim couldn’t be counted on. In fact, the School of Medicine was a practice-oriented faculty because of the difficulties in recruitment. Fortunately, those predictions turned out to be as accurate as a Texas Panhandle weather forecast.

“We were able to recruit national leaders like Dr. Chester (CAB) Bond and his wife, Dr. Cynthia Raehl, from the University of Wisconsin,” Nelson says. “We also attracted young but talented NIH post-doctoral fellows like David Allen and Jim and Carolyn Stoll; some of the most talented residency graduates in the country like Sherry Luedtke, Shawn Furness, Glenn Anderson and others; and senior hospital practice administrators like Roland Patry from Baylor University Medical Center. They were all intrigued by the new model of pharmacy education being planned for Texas Tech. We were also very fortunate to add some very talented local practitioners like Butch Habeger and Ranee Lenz who also saw the vision, so what I was frequently told would be a major barrier turned out not to be a barrier at all.”

Habeger, the SOP’s director of pharmacy operations, was a member of the search committee that initially interviewed Nelson for the founding dean position. He became one of the school’s founding faculty members and has been with the SOP longer than anyone except Nelson.

“I was impressed and excited to hear Dr. Nelson describe his vision of pharmacy education when he interviewed,” Habeger recalls. “What he described was the polar opposite of traditional pharmacy education and was exactly what I thought it should be. To this day, I am humbled and proud of what this school has accomplished. The school has improved on its beginning in too many ways to describe; no doubt this is to the credit of the senior faculty who provided their leadership and mentored the junior faculty.”

A significant amount of that senior faculty leadership was put into place when Bond and Raehl agreed to sign on. In addition to their national reputations as pharmacy practice educators, their 20-year study of more than 1,000 U.S. hospitals demonstrated how clinical pharmacists are associated with reductions in areas like mortality rates, total care and drug costs, lengths of stay and medication errors. Their research data was the catalyst for the fundamental change in the United Kingdom’s National Health Service structure for pharmacy services and it is cited in the U.S. Congressional debate on Medicare reform and The Joint Commission National Patient Safety Goals Initiative.

Raehl says she and Bond, who died in 2009, came to TTUHSC because of the rare opportunities and challenges such a move presented.

“We decided this was a once in a lifetime opportunity for an academic because a new pharmacy school had not opened in the U.S. for about 50 years,” Raehl explains. “We had made lifelong commitments to pharmacy education and public education, so we embraced the...
opportunity to help build the school from scratch. Dr. Nelson’s visions of the school’s curriculum and for a school-supported pharmacy residency program were also pivotal in our decision.”

Anderson, who left the SOP for the Marshall University School of Pharmacy in 2011, was initially interested in joining the SOP as a founding faculty member because of the unique pedagogy upon which the school’s curriculum was being built and because he felt the position he was offered would be a good fit for his career aspirations.

“Dr. Raehl was one of the most charismatic salespersons I have ever had the pleasure of meeting,” Anderson recalls. “I also came to Amarillo on a day in February when there were no clouds in the sky and it was 83 degrees. I sold my wife on coming to Amarillo based on how nice and constant the weather was during my stay. Of course, Dr. Nelson failed to tell me it was minus 5 and snowing the day after I left.”

Dr. Jim Stoll was working at the National Institutes of Health when Dr. David Allen, a co-worker and friend, suggested he apply at TTUHSC’s new pharmacy school. Eventually they both accepted positions as founding faculty members for the school.

“When I interviewed, the building was still under construction and you could still walk through the walls on the fourth floor,” Stoll recalls. “I do remember saying to Dr. Allen, who is a Kentucky boy, ‘David, they have no trees there.’ But I went to high school and college in New Mexico so I had been through Amarillo before. I had even eaten at the Big Texan before, though oddly enough, I haven’t since I’ve lived here.”

After Luedtke completed her residency training, she learned from two of her University of Wisconsin professors — Bond and Raehl — that TTUHSC was recruiting faculty for its new pharmacy program.

“The opportunity to begin an academic career at a new pharmacy school with no walls to breakdown and become part of a fresh approach to how a strong clinical doctor of pharmacy program should be delivered was exciting,” Luedtke says, “I interviewed with other so-called established programs and I felt a sense of elitism. At Tech there was a true sense of community and an attitude that everyone’s contribution was valued. It was also amazing to see the pride that the local community had in bringing the SOP to Amarillo.”

Some of Nelson’s fondest memories involve the working relationships that developed between the school’s early leadership team. The group included Richard Stull, who served as executive associate dean for academic affairs; Wendy Duncan Hewitt,

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**TTUHSC School of Pharmacy Through the Years**

**1993**
- The 73rd Texas Legislature establishes the TTUHSC School of Pharmacy. Lawmakers specified that it be located in Amarillo and that no state funds be used in its construction.

**1994**
- Arthur Nelson, R.Ph., Ph.D., is hired as founding dean.
- Fundraising efforts for the SOP begin in earnest. More than $13 million is eventually raised from the Amarillo Economic Development Corporation, the Amarillo Hospital District and a bevy of private donors.

**1995**
- Construction begins in March at 1300 S. Coulter St. on land donated by the Harrington Regional Medical Center.

**1996**
- The SOP building is officially dedicated on Aug. 14; the first semester begins with a 65-student founding class.
associate dean for student outcomes assessment; Joel Epps, assistant dean for finance and administration; and first Kristen Stutz, then Summer Balcer as assistant dean for student services.

“I remember best how we were one big family,” Nelson muses. “The challenges of planning and constructing a building, planning a curriculum and developing actual courses, laboratories and case studies seemed to bind the faculty and staff together as one big family. We worked together, relaxed together and celebrated the little successes as though they were major achievements. And then there was the excitement of seeing it all come together with the first applicants for our founding class. Selecting 65 people who were willing to take a risk on this new school with its new ideas and new strategies was extremely rewarding for all of us.”

Nelson also recalls how the recruitment of Raehl, Bond and Patry caught the eyes of many at pharmacy schools across the county. Why, people would ask, would academics and professionals with such established reputations leave places like the University of Wisconsin and Baylor University Medical Center to move to West Texas? Why would some of the best new residency and post-doctoral fellow graduates choose T-XAS Tech over some of the bigger name schools?

“These three individuals caused the established pharmacy community to stop and take at look at what we were planning and accomplishing in West Texas,” Nelson says emphatically. “Once they looked, they saw a new way to teach future pharmacists using technology as a basic tool of practice, spending significant time in clinical experiences across all four years and requiring small group problem-based learning commitments, not just from clinical faculty but also from basic biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences faculty. They saw full-time instruction — 18 hours per semester for 16 weeks plus exams; not the 15 weeks including exams that most schools had — and they saw a program that was committed to excellence and focused on the future practice of pharmacy.”

Many of the school’s early leaders are still with the program, a fact Nelson believes has helped the SOP thrive.

“Our leadership team, except for the associate dean for academic affairs’ position, have all been together almost from the beginning,” Nelson adds. “The associate dean’s position has turned over again and again because they were all recruited away to start new schools of pharmacy, which is high praise for the T-XAS Tech model of pharmacy education. Keeping the leadership team together over time has been the secret ingredient in the success of the school.
“Sadly, I also remember the difficult time and pain when Dr. Bond contracted cancer and the rapid progression of this dreaded disease that took his wit, humor and solid stewardship — sometimes through criticism — away from us.”

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

The TTUHSC School of Pharmacy building was officially dedicated Aug. 14, 1996, and the first semester was immediately under way with 65 students, 26 faculty, 10 staff and two departments: pharmacy practice and pharmaceutical sciences.

“I loved the motto of our first class of students: ‘We just did it first,’” Nelson says. “I also remember the 16-hour van ride from Amarillo to St. Louis in the early years to take students to the Regional APhA student meeting. Ms. Balcer rode shotgun and kept me awake all night while all the students slept laying on each other in the back three rows. When we got to St. Louis, I was so tired I slept through the first day of the meeting. Then we had to drive home, but it was great fun for everyone.”

Once some of the early excitement wore off, Nelson realized the program would need more faculty and more sources for delivering the school’s ambitious experiential program. He had initially proposed a 35-member faculty and envisioned a regional campus in Lubbock.

“I didn’t realize the significant lack of support our new school would get from University Medical Center in Lubbock,” Nelson says. “That required us to also look to other cities to deliver the experiential program.”

Fortunately for Nelson, he also underestimated the generosity and support of the West Texas legislative delegation, the Texas Tech administration and the Amarillo community when it came to providing facilities and operational funds. That allowed the program to clear those early hurdles and move forward quickly, and by the time the founding class received their degrees in 2000, their school would look much different than it had on the first day of class four years earlier.

The SOP began developing a regional program in Dallas/Fort Worth in 1997 with a handful of clinical placements. That same year the school started its Graduate Pharmacy Residency Programs.

In 1998, the Lubbock regional campus opened within the main TTUHSC building and under the direction of Dr. Charles Seifert. Later that year the school also began a small regional program in El Paso under the direction of Maumi Villarreal; started its Graduate Program in Pharmaceutical Sciences; and opened the Texas Pharmacy Museum in Amarillo.

“T’ll always be grateful to Billy Walker, who gave us the magnificent gift of starting the museum,” Nelson says. “It is a wonderful place to help us remember where the profession of pharmacy began and preserves the foundation of today’s practice. This special place gives our students, faculty, staff and friends an understanding of the roots of our profession in both the tools and implements of early pharmacists. It also conveys the care and concern that early practitioners showed for..."
their communities and the patients they served. If our future pharmacists can carry that spark of care and passion forward into their practice, the profession will continue to grow and make an important difference in people’s lives. That’s why understanding a profession’s heritage is important to the education process.”

The Dallas/Fort Worth regional campus officially opened in 1999 using space leased from Baylor University Medical Center. After completing their first two years at the main campus in Amarillo, SOP Pharm.D. students now had the option of remaining in Amarillo for years three and four or transferring to either Lubbock or Dallas/Fort Worth to complete their final two years.

In 2002, Dr. Richard Leff was named Dallas/Fort Worth regional dean and the campus was relocated to a renovated 4,800-square-foot building on the grounds of the North Texas Veterans Affairs Hospital. The VA facility was expanded to approximately 8,000 square feet in 2003, and in August 2008, the Dallas/Fort Worth campus expanded to a second location inside the Southwest Professional Building and adjacent to the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and the Dallas Medical District.

In 2003, the SOP began hosting the Texas Panhandle Poison Center, one of six regional poison centers established to provide emergency treatment information for poisonings or toxic exposures to the citizens of Texas.

The initial discussions for opening a four-year regional campus in Abilene started at a Texas Tech football game in 2004, and by the time the SOP celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2006, construction was under way in the Texas Big Country. The expansion was made possible through a collaborative effort of community and private organizations in Abilene including the City of Abilene, the Economic Development Corporation of Abilene, Hendrick Health System, Sears Methodist Retirement Centers, the Dodge Jones Foundation, the Dian Graves Owen Foundation and the Shelton Family Foundation.

The Abilene regional campus opened in August 2007 with a 40-member founding class and Dr. Kim Powell as regional dean. By 2011 the campus was at full strength with all four classes enrolled and the first graduates crossed the stage in May.

In 2007, the SOP and the Texas Tech University Rawls College of Business begin offering a combined Pharm.D./M.B.A. degree. The first SOP student to earn an M.B.A. through the program did so in 2010.

Expansion came to the Amarillo campus in 2009. In March, the TTUHSC Schools of pharmacy and medicine opened the 48,000-square-foot Amarillo Research Building, and in November, the SOP cut the ribbon on its 23,000-square-foot Pharmacy Academic Center. The facility included two 120-student classrooms and a 12-room patient simulation training and assessment center. That same year, the SOP’s annual extramural research funding topped $5 million for the first time. By the time Nelson announced he was stepping down as dean in 2011, the SOP’s annual extramural research funding had climbed past $7 million.

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<td>The Dallas/Fort Worth regional campus expands to a second location within the Dallas Medical District.</td>
<td>The Amarillo Research Building opens. The SOP's extramural research funding surpasses $5 million for the first time.</td>
<td>The first SOP student receives his M.B.A. through the SOP’s Pharm.D./M.B.A. program.</td>
<td>The SOP’s extramural research funding tops $7 million.</td>
<td>Founding Dean Arthur Nelson, R.Ph., Ph.D., steps down in July.</td>
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MEMORIES AND SUNSETS

Though he will step down as dean in July, and full retirement is getting closer, Nelson isn’t quite ready to ride off into one of those West Texas sunsets he has seen since he arrived nearly 20 years ago.

His immediate plans include taking a six-month sabbatical to work with the Central Office of the Veteran’s Administration Medical Center to conduct health outcomes research reports as the VAMC prepares to become the first major, nationwide health system to employ all pharmacists in direct patient care. Drug distribution and control will be delegated to technicians and technology, one of Nelson’s long-term visions for pharmacy.

After the sabbatical, Nelson will return to the SOP as a full-time faculty member to continue his VAMC research and to teach practice management for approximately one year. He and his wife, Sherida, will then retire and spend their springs, summers and falls in Spokane, Wash. with their son, daughter-in-law and two granddaughters. They will spend winters in Dallas with their daughter, Nelson’s brother and family and Sherida’s brother and family.

Even during retirement, Nelson plans to continue the SOP’s consultative engagement with other pharmacy schools, helping them make the transition to pharmacy education strategies that are more patient focused.

He will also have time to reflect on his career and remember some of the people who inspired him along the way. Nelson says the professors who influenced him most when he was a student were Drs. Edward Brecht and Farid Sadik.

Brecht was a senior faculty member at Northeast Louisiana State College when Nelson was a first-year pharmacy student. A former dean at the University of North Carolina, Brecht moved to Louisiana to help stabilize what was then a relatively new school.

“The transition for him was good; he had just lost his wife of many years,” Nelson recalls. “Dr. Brecht caught my attention by his active learning style. He would give the students riddles to solve that were related to the important concepts he was teaching. He was also a stickler for accurate answers — ‘a misplaced decimal could kill a patient,’ he would emphasize — and any inaccuracies were dealt with by a harsh penalty in the course grade.”

Nelson says Brecht always took the time to talk with his students, urging them to always act professionally and responsibly because others looked up to pharmacists as professionals.

“He taught inorganic chemistry, a very dry, rote memory course, and he wasn’t a very good classroom teacher,” Nelson adds. “But his riddles — I never solved any of them — and the time he had for students outside of class telling stories of the history of pharmacy endeared me to his way of approaching pharmacy education.”

Sadik, Nelson’s professor during his prescription dispensing class, had just received his Ph.D. from the University of Mississippi and he came to Northeast Louisiana State College for his first teaching position.

“Dr. Sadik was a wonderful gentleman and always had time for the students,” Nelson says. “We had two semesters of prescription dispensing as ‘capstone’ courses and he taught all the classes and labs. In his labs I learned to make creams and ointments, emulsions and hand-rolled suppositories, all valuable for passing the state board licensure examination, but not very relevant to pharmacy practice of the day.”

Sadik could sense Nelson was interested in teaching pharmacy and he encouraged Nelson to go on to graduate school.
“I was a teaching assistant in his laboratory and he became more than a mentor,” Nelson continues. “He was a true friend and someone with whom I consulted at every major point in my career. After I finished my graduate training at the University of Iowa and taught for three years at the University of Illinois Medical Center, he encouraged me to join the faculty at the University of South Carolina where he had moved as a senior faculty member. When I accepted the position, we became colleagues and friends. He never held the fact that I was an undergraduate student and lab assistant for him in pharmacy school against me; he treated me like a colleague, even from my graduate assistant days. Like Dr. Brecht, Dr. Sadik was focused on student professionalism and accuracy in all that you do. He taught me that honor was the most important attribute one could have in life.”

Nelson is also quick to acknowledge the role his family has played in helping achieve success in his career.

“My wife, who had only moved one time — across the street when her father built them a new home — has supported me moving about every 10 years or so as our careers moved forward. Our family committed to pharmacy and patient care: my wife, son and daughter are all pharmacists and my son is also a surgeon. My family accepted that I worked long hours and was often not at every sporting event or high school musical recital. Their love, support and willingness to pick me up when events seemed to be going the wrong way has really been the strength that carried me through the good and bad times.”

Nelson is modest when it comes to discussing personal achievements and awards. There have been many, and he is appreciative of each one, but he prefers to discuss the people he has met as a dean for three universities since 1984.

“The most important accomplishments have been the opportunities to transform young people’s lives, either as Pharm.D. or Ph.D. students, residents or as young faculty members just beginning their careers,” Nelson says without hesitation. “It’s a tremendous blessing to be given the opportunity to make a difference in someone’s growth and development, and by my opportunities to have even a very small part of their growth, I feel blessed by all the people these graduates and faculty have been able to serve and care for as pharmacists and teachers. It is a humbling thought to have been given such an opportunity in my career to, in some part, repay all those people who had such an impact on me over my life.”

Nelson is also proud of the 16 faculty members and administrators who have served under him and then gone on to become a pharmacy school dean themselves.

“I don’t take any credit other than to say I selected good people who were able to make themselves successful through hard work, dedication and a passion for helping others.”

As for a legacy, Nelson jokes that he hopes people will remember him as the founding dean — “people do tend to forget those little things,” he adds with a laugh — and that he helped others establish one of the strongest pharmacy schools in the country.

“I also hope they remember me as someone who was honest, loyal, fair and tried to be balanced in growing all areas of the school – maturation of the students, teaching, research, patient care and community and professional outreach. I hope they can say I was someone who would listen and change when I was wrong and that I valued our people above and beyond everything else.”