Call him profoundly influential – but also call him ‘Jack’

This year’s Lifetime Achievement Award winner gets called a lot of things by his many nominators: quadruple hitter, visionary, mentor, revolutionary, unsurpassed, profoundly effective.

But one thing is mentioned by all. “Everybody,” they say, “calls him Jack.” That may be because Dr. Jack Cronenwett is not just a legend among SVS members, but he is also unassuming.

“Jack is one of the kindest and most humble people that you could meet,” said Dr. Marc L. Schermerhorn. “I was immediately surprised when I arrived at Dartmouth as a vascular fellow and heard him say, ‘Call me Jack.’”

Of Dr. Cronenwett’s – excuse us – Jack’s major achievements, the first was at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. In the 1980s, Dartmouth had a relatively small, little-known division of vascular surgery, and Jack was its first vascular surgeon. “He has trained and recruited the entire faculty and turned it into a powerhouse, a division of vascular surgery that has national and international recognition,” wrote Dr. Jens Eldrup-Jorgensen in his nomination.

In addition, Jack was largely responsible for the development at Dartmouth of a new vascular surgery training paradigm – the 0+5 residency. “He had the first program and was instrumental in making this type of program a possibility at the board level,” Dr. Schermerhorn wrote.

Getting a 0+5 program approved by the American Board of Surgery was an almost insurmountable hurdle.

“From my perspective,” said Jack, “it was all about training. We were advocating for a concept. You didn’t need to have full general surgery training in order to become a vascular surgeon. It was inefficient. We needed to be more focused. We couldn’t expand training every time a new procedure came along and still think that these residents needed to know how to do breast surgery.”

“Many of us work in institutions or divisions where we simply had to carry on what had been started by others,” noted Dr. Richard Cambria. “That was not the case at Dartmouth, where the present status of that outstanding vascular
surgery division can be traced to Jack Cronenwett.”

The experience of building a program and expanding the processes of a vascular residency program seems to have whetted Jack’s appetite for leadership and educational excellence.

After the millennium, Jack’s legacy mushroomed with these outstanding achievements:

- 2002 – Spearheaded the Vascular Study Group of New England, a regional quality outcomes registry, which became the model for the future Vascular Quality Initiative

- 2003 – Took the reins of SVS as president and, with Dr. Tom Riles, then president of the American Association for Vascular Surgery (AAVS), convinced these organizations to merge and create an independent administrative office in Chicago, creating today’s more inclusive SVS.


- 2010, 2014 – Was co-editor of the 7th and 8th editions of Rutherford’s Vascular Surgery textbook with Dr. K. Wayne Johnston.

- 2011 – Helped launch the SVS-PSO as an official new entity and has served as medical director since.

**Vascular Study Group of New England.** This now well-known quality improvement registry was partially modeled after the Northern New England Cardiovascular Disease Study Group. “It was not just a copycat of NNECVSG,” noted Dr. Jorgensen. “Biannual regional meetings were developed to promote quality improvement, which is somewhat uncommon for a registry.”

The organization grew and earned the attention of other centers around the country and the world. Under the umbrella of the SVS, the study group opened its membership and renamed itself the Vascular Quality Initiative, which today has 375 centers and a multidisciplinary membership that includes cardiologists and radiologists.

**Vascular Quality Initiative.** The huge success of the VQI, Dr. Jorgensen added, “required not only wisdom and vision, but also great judgment and the ability to work collaboratively and collegially.”

“Some of us may now take it for granted,” said Dr. Anton Sidawy, “but those of us who were involved in the discussions about VQI remember the endless night calls that we spent listening to Jack making various arguments about why the Society should invest in such a program. He actually had the plan completely conceived, describing the details of the regional concept used currently by VQI. I also remember the many meetings during VAM to discuss the program. Jack had the vision, the persistence and the details to be able to convince the SVS leadership to adopt it. We did, and as they say, the rest is history.”

**President of SVS.** While serving as SVS president, Jack worked with Dr. Tom Riles to push for the merger of two vascular societies, the SVS and the AAVS, into today’s Society for Vascular Surgery.

**Senior co-editor, Journal of Vascular Surgery.** As co-editor from 2003-2008, Jack has been recognized for leading significant changes that improved the content, quality and impact of the publication.

“Jack’s tenure on the Journal is when the number of submissions began to accelerate, exceeding a thousand per year,” recalled SVS President Dr. Bruce A. Perler. “He also started a program at the annual meeting to teach reviewers.”

He also served as a senior editor for recent editions of Rutherford’s Vascular Surgery textbook. The modern understanding of the pathophysiology and surgical decision-making surrounding the management of aortoiliac occlusive and infrarenal aortic aneurysm disease is profoundly influenced by his early work, and his early studies of actuarial survival after aortic aneurysm surgery and cost effectiveness of asymptomatic carotid endarterectomy have inspired a generation of researchers.
A prolific writer and publisher himself, Jack has published more than 200 peer-reviewed journal articles, contributed chapters to more than 50 books, co-edited 14 books, delivered more than 300 invited presentations and made nearly 200 peer-reviewed presentations at regional and national meetings.

In response to receiving this award, Jack expressed profound gratitude to his colleagues in the SVS for this recognition. “To me, this should really be called the SVS Lifetime ‘Opportunity’ Award. I have been afforded so many opportunities by the SVS during my life, which are only exceeded by the great number of close friendships that I have developed through the SVS. This has been a privilege and source of great gratification for me throughout my career.”

Among all his nominators and their excellent, thorough and effusive recommendations, Dr. Larry Kraiss summed it up as well as anyone: “Jack’s contributions outside of the VQI would make him a very strong candidate for the Lifetime Achievement Award. When you credit him with the VQI and its long-term positive impact on the SVS, I think he is a slam dunk.”

Congratulations, Dr. Slam Dunk Cronenwett.