

Childhood aspirations leads to long-term career

This is the first of a series of periodic features of doctors offering outreach clinics in Hawarden.

By Kim Fickett

Ever since he was a young boy, Gary Carlton aspired to be a doctor.

“I’ve known I wanted to be a doctor since I was seven or eight years old because they help people out and are someone everybody seemed to look up to,” said Carlton, general surgeon at Midlands Clinic, Dakota Dunes. “I knew I wanted to have that kind of occupation.”

Fifty-five years later Carlton is living that dream that began as a youth.

Carlton began his pursuit of a medical career while attending Cornell University in Ithica, NY from 1964-68 where he received his bachelor of science degree in genetics. From 1968-1972, he attended medical school at the University of Nebraska. Carlton then completed a general surgery residency at Lincoln’s VA Administration Hospital and at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital from 1972-1976. After completing his residencies, Carlton worked in the ER in Oneonta, NY for two years and followed that with a pediatric surgery fellowship at Denver Children’s Hospital for one year.

“I loved working in the ER because it offered me a variety of things to keep me busy and thinking,” said Carlton. “My pediatric surgery fellowship at Denver Children’s Hospital taught me a lot and gave me a good start. I had some of my best teachers there that are some of the most well-known surgeons in

international circles.”

After spending a year in Denver, Carlton moved to Sioux City in 1979 to practice general surgery. For the past three years he has also held an outpatient clinic at Hawarden Community Hospital on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month. Carlton averages around four patients a day in Hawarden and around 25 a day at the Dakota Dunes office.

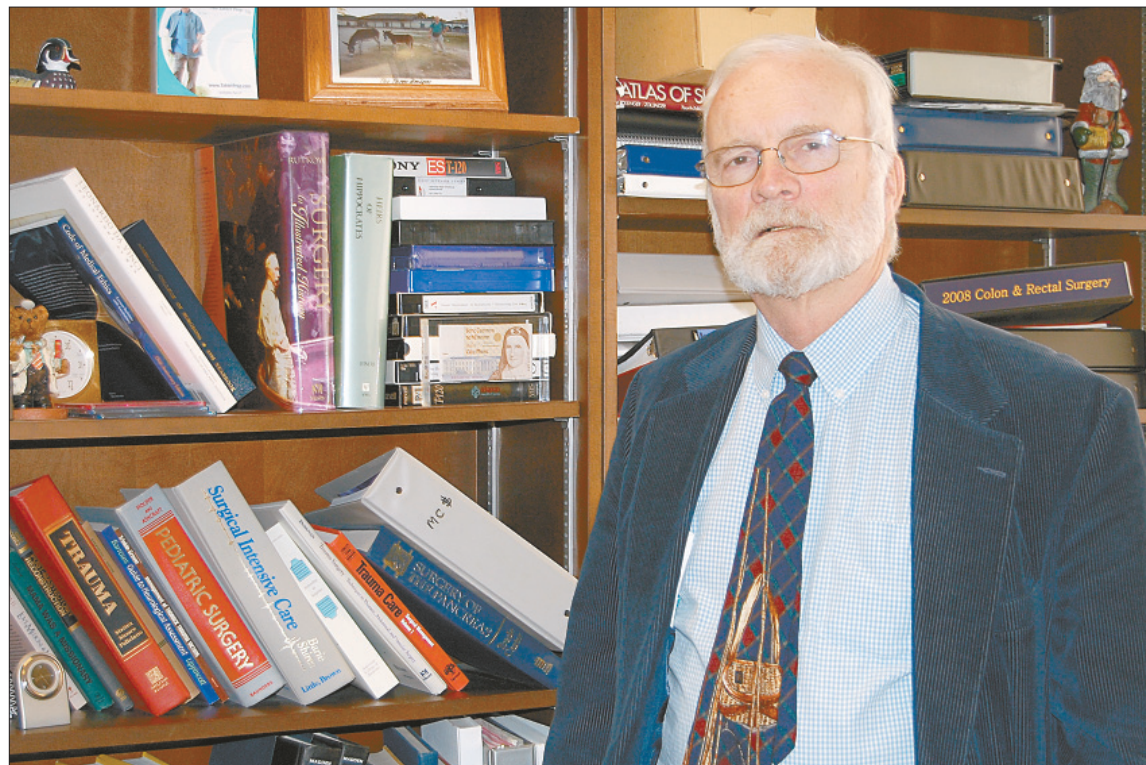
While Carlton chose general surgery as his specialty, he admits it crossed his mind to practice other specialties.

“I thought about it at different times but general surgery offers such a variety of things that I just didn’t want to limit my focus to one area of surgery,” he said.

His choice to not limit his focus to one area of surgery has also allowed him to share his talents with people in much need of medical care across the world.

During the last five years, Carlton has been a part of four mission trips to Honduras, beginning with his first trip in 2003.

“I first got interested in mission work during medical school and took an elective course,” said Carlton. “I was fascinated by what it would be like to do something in third world medicine. I told my academic advisor of my interest and he said ‘I know of a place where you can go.’ He knew of a doctor who gave up his practice in Kansas to live in Guatemala permanently because he knew they needed him more there than he was needed here. My advisor wrote a letter and I was accepted to his friend’s clinic



Dr. Gary Carlton

in Guatemala where I spent two months.”

Carlton said his past mission trips have consisted of 10 days where they travel far into the mountains to reach different villages in Honduras.

“Most people there don’t have medical care so we do what we can with outpatient clinics and, if needed, send them to the city if they need emergency surgery. We bring all our own medicines, equipment and food with us to be able to offer medical outpatient clinics for seven to 10 days straight,” said Carlton.

On Jan. 2, Carlton joined a group on a mission trip to Bolivia to perform surgery.

“This trip is different than mission trips in the past because we will be performing

surgery. While they do have a surgery unit there, we will still be taking a lot of supplies with us because they are under supplied,” said Carlton.

“The ability to be able to go on these mission trips and make a difference in the lives of these people gives me a warm feeling inside that I am able to do that for someone else,” he said.

When Carlton is not helping his patients locally or traveling across the world to help people in need of medical care, he tries to find time for his most beloved hobby: fishing.

“I’m an avid fisherman,” said Carlton. “I don’t have as much time to do it as I like but I do it every chance I get.”

Recently Carlton has got-

ten into fly fishing after a friend invited him to his cabin in Montana.

“That’s what caught me,” he said. “It’s always in beautiful country and there is quite a bit of art to it and a technique to doing it well.”

In addition to fishing, Carlton enjoys stain glass work, fly tying, and reading.

While Carlton lived all over the Midwest because his father worked for a telephone company and for the Air Force, he spent most of his childhood in Omaha. Carlton and his wife Pam have two children: Kristiana, an accountant in Denver, and Chad a fighter pilot in the Air Force who lives in Missouri.