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Baylor honors DeBakey with library, museum

Heart surgeon hailed for impact on care and teaching

By **TODD ACKERMAN**
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Mayra Beltran Chronicle
A portrait of DeBakey graces the entrance of the Michael E. DeBakey Library and Museum. Among those attending the Friday opening was one-time rival Dr. Denton Cooley.

Baylor College of Medicine on Friday opened the Michael E. DeBakey Library and Museum, a much-awaited tribute to the pioneering cardiovascular surgeon and the medical school and medical center he built.

The facility, nearly two decades in the making, chronicles DeBakey's life and the evolution of heart surgery, from his early inventions and surgical firsts to his famous patients to the growth of Baylor and the Texas Medical Center. DeBakey died in 2008.

“Dr. DeBakey single-handedly raised the standard of medical care, teaching and research around the world,” Dr. George Noon, a former student and surgical colleague of DeBakey, said at the grand opening. “He was the greatest surgeon of the 20th century, and physicians everywhere are indebted to him for his contributions to medicine.”

Just prior to the opening, Baylor officials unveiled an 8-foot-tall bronze statue of DeBakey, clad in surgical scrubs, mask pulled off. The statue stands in a Baylor courtyard in front of the library and museum.

Among the big names in attendance was Dr. Denton Cooley, who said the museum “brings back a lot of fond memories” of the former partner with whom he reconciled in late 2007, after their 40-year feud. Comparing the new museum to his own at the Texas Heart Institute, Cooley said, “Michael was always able to outdo me, and he's done it again.”

Dr. Donald Lindberg, director of the National Library of Medicine, called the facility “a wonderful celebration unprecedented in the history of U.S. medicine.” He said “this is the place for these things to be seen, an inspiration to people considering a career in medicine.”

The museum includes highlights of DeBakey's career — the Roller Pump he invented as a student; a replica of the sewing machine he used to design the first Dacron graft; a reproduction of his operating room; videos of his ground-breaking surgeries from the '50s and '60s; photographs of the many celebrities he treated; and the big awards she received.

But the museum's most memorable artifacts tell the lesser-known stories — the desk bearing hot burn marks left when the preoccupied doctor would forget to set heated plates on their placemats as he worked through the night; the video of him looking sheepish as his 3-year-old crawled around the stage, then onto his lap, at a public event where Lady Bird Johnson

Resources

MICHAEL E. DEBAKEY LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

Location: One Baylor Plaza

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays

Admission: Free

dedicated a building in his honor.

Dr. William Butler, who succeeded DeBakey as president and is serving as interim president, told how closely DeBakey was involved in the museum's planning, including the selection of the portrait visitors see upon entering. The talks started in 1983, he said, when DeBakey told him he'd like a place to display his papers and memorabilia and continued until shortly before his death, when the surgeon reviewed the entire set of mock-ups.

“After voicing his approval, he looked up to me from his wheelchair and reflected, ‘You know Bill, perhaps I really was the father of cardiovascular surgery.’”

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