

Celebs, locals sought Dr. Chuck Supple

Doctor, now 90, cared for movie stars at Palm Springs Medical Clinic

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"It's nearly impossible to get a doctor into a tuxedo these days," noted physician Charles J. Supple observed. Scion of the community, Chuck would know. He spent a good many years at a good many charity events dressed up in support of good causes, including the United Way, Airport Commission, the Air Museum, Academy of Medicine and the American Medical Tennis Association. Over the course of his career and life in Palm Springs Chuck witnessed a remarkable time and had an unusual practice.

He was prescient about what was going to happen in medicine with Managed Care and Pre-Paid Care insurance programs, but that isn't the most interesting part of his story. The serendipity and just plain, good fun that attended his life is actually fascinating.

Chuck hails from Danville, Illinois where he attended grade school at Garfield and then matriculated to Danville High School. Several of his schooltime contemporaries would go on to be world famous: Dick and Jerry Van Dyke, future television and movie stars; cabaret singer and pianist Bobby Short of the Café Carlyle in New York; and dancer and movie star Donald O'Connor, who was often absent from school as he was out on the vaudeville circuit with his parents. Gene Hackman also went to Danville High School, but years after Chuck was there.

Chuck finished high school and college with outstanding grades, and served in the Army during the tail end of World War II, and went to medical school. He practiced medicine in the small midwestern town of Danville as well as Toledo, Illinois, and was elected



Palm Springs Medical Clinic located at 1695 North Sunrise Way.

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mayor in 1957, which mad him the youngest mayor in the country at the time. He started the Danville Tennis Club and through prodigious fundraising efforts built the town's first courts. He was a country doctor, privy to the joys and travails of his patients. But Chuck ended up in Palm Springs, because his wife's arthritis was eased tremendously by a visit to the salubrious climate here.

The country doctor easily translated to Palm Springs; it's just that the patients were often movie stars, but the travails were much the same. One of Chuck's first patients was Marjorie Rambeau Gudger. She had been a silent film star and made the transition to talkies. She retired to marry Francis Gudger, a very wealthy businessman. She decided Dr. Supple should make house calls as she'd rather not come to the clinic. She told him if he really wanted to be successful and be a proper Southern Californian, he would have to ditch his crew cut and let his hair grow out.

"Evidently one person would tell another and it seemed in no time every day I had a famous name on the appoint-

ment book." The good doctor remembers that one day Milton Berle came to the office, and Chuck told Berle how much he and his family enjoyed his TV show. Berle beamed and immediately began telling jokes. After about 15 minutes, Berle patted Dr. Supple on the back and remarked, "Thank you. You made me feel so much better." He left the office and Chuck never did know why he came in.

Red Skelton would hold court in the waiting room, telling stories, and invariably wrecking the schedule as patients wanted to stay and listen rather than go back to their examination room. Eva Gabor came swishing in one afternoon. When he was through with his examination, he handed her a slip to give to the receptionist to make the bill. She looked incredulously at the paper, "Darlink, vee don't pay but you may use our name." Dr. Supple responded, "Darlink, I don't need your name, but money we can always use!" She never came back.

Steve McQueen called in a panic saying he had a friend with a laceration and needed help. Dr. Supple suggested the emergency room, but McQueen de-

murred saying they couldn't have any publicity, and please come to his home on Southridge. Dr. Supple found Natalie Wood there in a bathrobe with a big cut over her eyebrow. He recommended a plastic surgeon, but they refused, pleading with him to just suture the cut. On the kitchen table, with the help of a gooseneck lamp, Dr. Supple carefully repaired the wound. Thirty-six hours later, with her hair parted on the opposite side, to cover the stitches, she married Robert Wagner for the second time.

Bill and Ardis Holden lived across Driftwood from the Supples and became good friends. The Holdens had a large, four-lot estate with a beautiful garden. Often locking himself out, he would get one of the Supple children to climb through the TV opening in the patio wall into the bedroom and then open the front door. The Holdens divorced and Bill's new girlfriend, Stephanie Powers would often wash her little Mercedes roadster in the Driftwood driveway wearing "the briefest of bikinis."

Movie stars, Hollywood moguls, businessmen, tourists and local townspeople were all patients of Dr. Supple, visiting the Palm Springs Medical Clinic. Renamed the Palm Springs Medical Center after a suggestion from publisher-extraordinaire Milt Jones, with whom Dr. Supple was friends, the original building was designed by E. Stewart Williams prior to Dr. Supple's arrival in town. The land, at the corner of Sunrise and Vista Chino was purchased from Culver Nichols by the medical group, but was thought to be too far out of town. Subsequent expansions resulted in a very handsome building designed by Donald Wexler.

Dr. Supple's decades of service to his patients made him integral to Palm Springs. Years of tennis at the Racquet Club and Tennis Club kept him fit well into retirement. Chuck turned ninety a few years back and is still going strong, even occasionally sporting a tuxedo for a worthy cause.