Dr Joseph Kenneally is many things. He is a general dental practitioner in the town of Biddeford in the state of Maine in the United States of America. He is a former Vice President of the American Dental Association. He’s a family man with adult children. He is also the 2015 President of the International College of Dentists (ICD or just College). With 12,000 members, it is the largest and oldest honorary society of dentists in the world. And it is in his role with the ICD that Joe believes that his life, and his family story, will come full circle in October of this year. He will come to Ireland to preside over a global meeting of his profession in the country that his grandfather, a blacksmith, left in the early part of the last century. We in Ireland sometimes underestimate the emotional ties of the diaspora to our country. We shouldn’t. Dr Joe Kenneally is a man who has achieved a great deal in his life and it is evident from talking to him that it means a great deal to him to return to Ireland as President of the ICD.

ICD in Dublin

Joe Kenneally comes to Dublin with an agenda – the agreement and adoption of a strategic plan for the future of the ICD. It’s a big ask for an organisation that is so multicultural. “Some of our members place great emphasis on leadership, others on the honour; and others again on our humanitarian work. It’s a challenge to get all of them to agree to a single strategic plan,” says Joe. However, the underlying drive is for growth. The ICD currently has about 12,000 Fellows. Joe believes that the top 2% of dentists in the world should be members, so there is room to grow to about 72,000 members globally.

The ICD is a huge organisation, being divided into regions across the world. The European Section is currently headed by well-known Irish dentist Dr Tom Feeney (a former member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of the Irish Dental Association). The executive is familiar with the peer-reviewed science, but the most gratifying part for him is the positive impact on the oral health of our population.”

Leadership

The role that Joe played in promoting the fluoridation of water in his area identified him as a dentist with leadership skills. He went on to become President of the Maine Dental Association, and later, Vice President nationally of the American Dental Association. In was in this capacity with the ADA that and the Humanities in a New England college. His uncle, however, was a dentist and guided Joe into the profession. As with most professors in the USA, dentistry is a postgraduate qualification. Joe studied medical biology for his primary degree at the same college where his father taught, and then proceeded to the Dental School at Tufts’s University in Boston. Qualifying in the early 1980s, he went to work in a dental practice for two years. He then set up on his own practice in Biddeford, Maine, the very same coastal town where his uncle was in practice. There was, he says, never any sense of competition between them – rather his uncle continued to encourage him.

Flouridation

Joe was quickly invited to join the Rotary Club in Biddeford and each new Rotarian is asked to make a presentation. Joe decided to make his on the benefits to oral health of community water fluoridation. He must have made an impression because he was then asked to chair a committee to lobby for fluoridation of the drinking water in the Biddeford area. Despite some naysayers telling him that he would not succeed, the population of the area voted 70:30 in favour of fluoridation and the water has been fluoridated at a rate of 0.4ppm ever since. Joe has been a lifelong advocate of water fluoridation as a result: “Thirty years ago we were seeing high levels of decay and carry in almost all adolescents in Biddeford. Nowadays it is unusual if our children need restorations of any type. A lot of our children are making it into adulthood without ever having a restoration. That’s a big change just in my lifetime and I believe that fluorides has had a significant positive impact on the oral health of our population.”

Leadership

Joe’s journey

Joe Kenneally is a second-generation Irish American. His grandfather was a blacksmith who emigrated to the United States from Tipperary. With the classic determination of hard working people, Joe’s dad became a Professor in Arts at a New England college. His uncle, however, was a dentist and guided Joe into the profession. As with most professors in the USA, dentistry is a postgraduate qualification. Joe studied medical biology for his primary degree at the same college where his father taught, and then proceeded to the Dental School at Tufts’s University in Boston. Qualifying in the early 1980s, he went to work in a dental practice for two years. He then set up on his own practice in Biddeford, Maine, the very same coastal town where his uncle was in practice. There was, he says, never any sense of competition between them – rather his uncle continued to encourage him.

Flouridation

Joe was quickly invited to join the Rotary Club in Biddeford and each new Rotarian is asked to make a presentation. Joe decided to make his on the benefits to oral health of community water fluoridation. He must have made an impression because he was then asked to chair a committee to lobby for fluoridation of the drinking water in the Biddeford area. Despite some naysayers telling him that he would not succeed, the population of the area voted 70:30 in favour of fluoridation and the water has been fluoridated at a rate of 0.4ppm ever since. Joe has been a lifelong advocate of water fluoridation as a result: “Thirty years ago we were seeing high levels of decay and carry in almost all adolescents in Biddeford. Nowadays it is unusual if our children need restorations of any type. A lot of our children are making it into adulthood without ever having a restoration. That’s a big change just in my lifetime and I believe that fluorides has had a significant positive impact on the oral health of our population.”

Leadership

The role that Joe played in promoting the fluoridation of water in his area identified him as a dentist with leadership skills. He went on to become President of the Maine Dental Association, and later, Vice President nationally of the American Dental Association. In was in this capacity with the ADA that...