

## Bellevue Public Schools



## Alumni Spotlight



# Col. (Dr.) Gene Gaspard Bellevue West, 1982

Col. (Dr.) Gene Gaspard almost always has a full schedule. Between his dental practice in Bellevue, his professional commitments in the military, and spending time with his family, he leads a very active life. However we were lucky enough to catch up with Dr. Gaspard for a brief interview where he shared about his time at Bellevue West, his military career, and how he almost became a civil engineer rather than a dentist.

## What high school did you attend and what year did you graduate?

I graduated from Bellevue West in 1982.

## Did you attend any other schools in Bellevue?

I also attended both Logan and Mission middle schools.

## Who were some of your favorite teachers?

Three teachers come to mind. Mrs. French taught English. English was never one of my favorite subjects, but she had a way of making the class more interesting. Mr. Kratina, who was also an English teacher, was just a fun educator. I remember he was always telling jokes. I may or may not have been the subject of many of his jokes. Finally, Mr. Schmidt, the band director. I was a percussionist and he always had a way of pushing his students to reach their musical potential.

Oh, and although she was not a teacher, I can't forget Mrs. Salcedo, who worked in the cafeteria. I hate to admit, but I had the worst lunch diet back in those days. I would get a double order of fries and one of those thick chocolate milkshakes we all used to love. She would always ask me how my day was going with a smile on her face. She was just a caring individual.

## What clubs, groups, and organizations were you involved with?

I played baseball. I was also in Honor Society as well as Jr/Sr Senate.

## Did you have any favorite places to hang out in town?

We hung out at Pizza Haven, McDonald's, Burger King, and Baskin Robins Ice Cream). I had friends that worked there so it was always a bonus to get free ice cream. We also would go "cruising" up and down Dodge St or walk the Old Market when the weather permitted. In school, the Commons were always the place to hang out with your friends.

### Did you have a job in high school?

I worked at Village Inn for a short time. I also detasseled corn one summer. I worked at Rosenblatt Stadium the summer after graduation.

### Do you have siblings who attend BPS?

My older brothers graduated in 1978 and 1980. My younger sister graduated in 1990.



### What did you do after graduation?

After graduation, I went to Iowa State University for undergrad and then to Creighton University School of Dentistry. After dental school, I was commissioned as a Dental Officer in the Navy. I spent a year at Naval Air Station Miramar (at the time, Home of Top Gun fighter pilot training). I then spent two years at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, TX.

After that, I transferred to the Air Force and was back at Offutt for four years, and then I spent a year in South Korea.

I separated from active duty and joined our practice (Family Dentistry Bellevue) in 2000. I did transition into the Air Force Reserves in 2000, serving in a variety of positions including

- Chief of Dental Services at Offutt AFB
- Medical Commander at Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina
- Director of Air Force Dental Plans and Policy at the Air Force Medical Readiness Agency in San Antonio, Texas
- Director of Air Force Dental Manpower Management at HQ USAF
- Office of Air Force Surgeon General, in Falls Church, Virginia.

I am currently a Colonel and serve as the Chief of the Air Force Reserve Dental Corp at HQ Air Force Reserve Command at Robins AFB, Georgia. I also hold a faculty position at Creighton University School of Dentistry.



## What went into your decision to pursue a career in Dentistry?

That's a long story for sure. In my senior year in high school, like many of my peers, I had no clue as to what I was supposed to do with the rest of my life. So, I took the ACT, and it tells me I would be a good fit in engineering or in the health profession field. The thought of going to 4 more years of college did not appeal to me, so I chose Civil Engineering.

Fast forward three years to the spring semester of my junior year. I applied for a summer internship at the City of Omaha's Water Treatment Facility. The individual who interviewed me asked some posing questions. Why do you want to be an engineer? Do you know any engineers? I'm guessing in my responses, he sensed I was not "all in" to Civil Engineering. He went on to lecture me about choosing a career path that I was passionate about. I can still hear his voice saying, "If engineering isn't your passion, I encourage you to find out what it is and follow that path. You don't want to spend the next 40 years in a job you aren't happy in." Needless to say, I did not get the internship but I did get some sound advice that I would eventually act on.

That conversation haunted me for the next few months. One night during summer break, I had one of those "aha" moments. I realized that the first 3 years of college had actually gone by pretty fast, another 5 years wouldn't be that bad, especially if I was pursuing something I had a passion for. The next day, I spoke with my academic advisor and shared my story as well as my desire to change my major to premed. Surprisingly, after hearing my story, he agreed with my decision and put me in touch with another advisor.

A few months later I had an annual dental cleaning with my dentist. He encouraged me to consider dentistry. I was able to shadow him in his office and quickly realized I had found my passion. I still wish I could remember the name of the gentleman who interviewed me back in the day. I would surely thank him for the literally life-changing advice he gave me.



## What is involved in your commitment to the Air Force Dental Corps?

In my role as Chief of the Reserve Dental Corp, I am essentially always “on call” 24/7. All the other Corp Chiefs (medical/Nurse/biological sciences, medical service administrators) are full-time positions. I am available on every reserve weekend and spend 4 weeks at Robins AFB during the year.



## What are some boards and associations you are a member of?

I am a member of the Academy of General Dentistry, the American Dental Association, the Nebraska Dental Association, the Omaha District Dental Society, The Reserve Officers Association, and the Military Officers Association of America.

I am also currently the Omaha District Trustee to the Nebraska Dental Association, the Secretary of the Omaha District Dental Society, and will transition to President-elect this summer. I am also the Air Force Reserve liaison to the American Dental Association.

## What are some of the awards and recognitions you have received over the years?

Early in my military career, I won the Commander's Award for Clinical Excellence and Community Service while stationed in Corpus Christi. I also won Junior Officer of the Quarter and Junior Officer of the Year while on active duty Air Force. Although we don't have an Air Force Reserve dental General Officer position, I was honored to be selected to the Reserve Brigadier General Qualification List.



## What advice do you have for people who want to improve their dental health?

Only brush and floss the teeth you want to keep. All kidding aside, I highly recommend individuals visit their dentist twice a year. Many major dental problems can be prevented if diagnosed and treated as early as possible. Healthy teeth and gums can also prevent other health issues. Studies have shown a strong link between periodontal disease and heart disease.

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## About Us

The Alumni Spotlight is a recurring feature of the BPS Alumni Association. If you know of a graduate of Bellevue East, Bellevue West, or Bellevue High that we should shine a spotlight on, please reach out to us at **[bps.alumni@bpsne.net](mailto:bps.alumni@bpsne.net)** and they will be considered for a future column. Continue to invite your friends and family to Like and Follow our Alumni Association page: <https://www.facebook.com/BPSAlumni1>

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