

# Army Boots to Dental Roots

How military service helped a veteran build a thriving dental group in the Pacific Northwest.

**D**oes your dentist have 440,000 patients? Dr. Eugene Skourtes does. The Army veteran opened

his first office in Portland, Ore., with three other employees. Today he employs 141 dentists at 46 offices in Oregon, Washington and Idaho. And he credits his military experience with giving him the foundation to build the thriving practice.

Skourtes was waiting to begin dental school at the University of Oregon in the fall of 1964 when he got his draft notice. He showed the draft board his acceptance letter and asked if they'd rather have him serve as a dentist or an infantryman. Fortunately for Skourtes, they opted for a dentist. When he graduated dental school, Skourtes volunteered for the Army and served as a military dentist from 1968 to 1970.

"I really enjoyed it. I was stationed in Vinton Hill Farms, Va. It was considered a remote area. And so not only did I treat infantrymen but also dependents, so children, mothers, fathers, grandparents, whomever," Skourtes said.

When he left the Army, Skourtes didn't have a plan. He was married with two young children, and his wife wanted to return to Oregon. He met a dentist there who needed an associate to work under a capitation dental plan, where dentists are paid a monthly premium for each patient versus the traditional fee-for-service model. The plan allows dentists to focus on prevention, Skourtes said.

"And when I heard that, I thought, 'Wow, what a great way to practice—to make patients healthy and get paid for it,'" he said. "And that's basically how the whole thing started."

They opened their office in 1970 in Portland, and by 1978 had opened a second office in Portland. Blue



Cross began selling their plan, and the practice grew steadily. It eventually expanded to three states.

"Our mission was to stop the disease-repair cycle by evidence-based methods of prevention and treatment," Skourtes said.

He credits his military experience for much of his success.

"It taught me to be a leader. I liked the camaraderie ... But I also learned from some of the dentists who had been in the military longer that helped me to become a better dentist. I learned how to extract teeth—difficult teeth—things that you really don't get in dental school. So when I left the military after two years, not that you're ever at 100 percent, but I certainly felt that I was at 95 percent in knowing how to be a good, clinical dentist."

His best advice for veterans who either want to start or scale a business?

"Let's face it, it's tough. But if you have an idea and you really believe in it, don't give up," he said. ☺



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– Dr. Eugene Skourtes

Willamette   
Dental Group

**Dr. Eugene Skourtes**

President & Chief Executive Officer  
Willamette Dental Group  
Hillsboro, OR

**Age:** 84

**Military Service:**

Captain (O-3), Army (1968-1970)

**MOS:** Dentist

**Post-Secondary Education:**

- Bachelor's degree, University of Oregon, 1962
- Doctor of Dental Medicine, University of Oregon (1968)

**License:** Licensed to practice dentistry in Oregon, Washington & Idaho