

Earliest accredited Athletic Training Program is at MSU

Long partnership with OFC

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Mankato, MN — The nation's oldest, continually accredited athletic training education program celebrates its 35th anniversary this weekend at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

At the same time, the program marks 40 years of support by the partners who made it possible: physicians of the Orthopaedic & Fracture Clinic, P.A. (OFC) of Mankato.

In 1969 MSU and three other universities created the country's first athletic training education programs, thanks to the vision and persistence of founding MSU athletic trainer Gordon L. Graham, and to the OFC.

Now, more than three decades after the program's first students graduated, MSU-educated athletic trainers are advising and assisting professional and amateur athletes throughout the country: in the NFL, the NHL and the NBA, in colleges and universities, in high schools, and in clinics, health clubs and business and industry.

MSU's program has grown from a 26-credit undergraduate minor in 1969 to a 65-credit major that requires 1,100 hours of supervised clinical experience. Training facilities for Maverick athletes have grown, too – from 836 square feet when "Gordy" Graham came to MSU in 1964, to nearly 9,000 square feet today.

In 1969 it was a program whose time had come, because, as Graham says, "the medical care was needed," especially at the 25,000 U.S. high schools that offered athletics. "In those days only 32 high schools across the country had athletic trainers. Some coaches didn't even have first aid training."

In 1969 the president of the American Medical Association learned that Graham was developing an athletic training curriculum. The AMA told MSU that it should implement the program. "It was approved in six weeks by the internal committees and the president," Graham said. The proposal was quickly okayed by the board of trustees and the National Athletic Trainers Association.

From the first four programs (MSU, Eastern Illinois, Indiana State and New Mexico), the number of accredited athletic training education institutions has grown to 134. Many of them used Graham's outline as a model.

Graham retired in 1994, and was inducted into the National Athletic Trainer's Association Hall of Fame for his pioneering work. Dr. Kent Kalm became director of MSU's athletic training program, and was succeeded by current director Dr. Patrick Sexton. Both are MSU graduates.

Drs. John Eustermann and John Heimark of the Mankato Clinic, as well as Dr. Jack Butzer, former MSU student health services physician, made valuable teaching and diagnostic contributions in the early years. That tradition is carried on by current student health physicians Drs. Todd Kanzenbach and Randy Hurd.

But much of the credit for the program's success goes to the founders of the Orthopaedic & Fracture Clinic, Drs. Paul Gislason and Donald Meredith, and to current senior partner Dr. Wynn Kearney Jr. and his OFC colleagues. Not only have many OFC physicians given their services as team doctors, but they've taught, advised and supervised hundreds of students.

OFC Drs. Steven Curtis and Scott Stevens are the current MSU team doctors.

"Our program wouldn't be possible without the OFC," says Sexton. "The partners donate hundreds of hours of time each year, teaching classes, supervising students at their clinics and at games, and providing medical services for athletes at all men's hockey and football games and at many tournaments."

"Over the years, they've given close to 6,000 hours of time. In addition, they provide athletic training to high schools in Mankato and the surrounding area."

Every week during the school year an OFC surgeon drives to the University to see MSU student athletes who are injured, says Head Athletic Trainer Jeff Chambers. During breaks at hockey or football games, OFC doctors consult with athletes from other MSU sports. Physicians and staff also open OFC facilities to diagnose and treat injured athletes in a timely fashion.

"The OFC physicians and staff are great fans and supporters," adds Lisa Dahman, College of Nursing and Allied Health development officer. "In addition to helping on the sidelines, they come to watch many games."

In 2002, because of its years of service to MSU, the OFC received the Sports Medicine Enhancement Award from the Minnesota Athletic Trainers Association.

A booklet about the history of the OFC and MSU's athletic training education program, "Reflections on a Healthy Relationship," by area author Dan Vance, was published recently. It is being distributed by the MSU Athletic Training Department, and is available to anyone who contributes \$25 or more to the program.

The 35th anniversary, and the program's long relationship with the OFC, are being celebrated Saturday, Oct. 9, with tours of the MSU training facilities, a "Taste of Mankato" luncheon at 11 a.m. under the MSU Bell Tower, the 1 p.m. Homecoming game, and a 5:30 p.m. reception in downtown Mankato.