



**Looking Back, Leading Forward:
A Coffee Conversation with Dr. Chris Roberts Discussing GLAO's Centennial Celebration**

By: Brandon Shoukri

This October marks a remarkable milestone for the Great Lakes Association of Orthodontists - a full century of excellence. As we look ahead to the celebration taking place in **Columbus, Ohio on October 23–24**, it's worth pausing to reflect on the incredible legacy that have defined this organization over the past 100 years.

Dr. Chris Roberts built a distinguished career in orthodontics, beginning with the private practice he opened in Findlay, Ohio, in 1987. Although he has since retired from private practice, his commitment to the profession remains as strong as ever. He continues to serve as an adjunct clinical professor in the Department of Orthodontics and Pediatric Dentistry at the University of Michigan, where he has been a dedicated faculty member since 1990.

His academic journey started at The Ohio State University, where he earned both his bachelor's degree and his DDS. He then completed his orthodontic residency at Eastman Dental Center at the University of Rochester in New York.

Over the years, Dr. Roberts has been deeply involved in organized dentistry and orthodontics. He has served on numerous leadership boards and is a past president of the Great Lakes Association of Orthodontists (GLAO), the Ohio Association of Orthodontists, and the Hancock County Dental Society. On the national stage, he joined the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) Board of Trustees in 2011 and went on to serve as AAO President from 2020 to 2021.

Today, Dr. Roberts remains actively engaged in shaping the future of the specialty. He is Director of the Graduate Orthodontic Residents Program (GORP) and serves on the Board of Directors of The Orthodontists Insurance Company (AAOIC). His ongoing work with residents reflects his passion for mentoring the next generation of orthodontists and investing in their growth.

Dr. Roberts also exemplifies the kind of dedication and energy that sustains an organization for a century. This year, he completed his 27th Boston Marathon, an astonishing testament to his perseverance, discipline, and long-term commitment. His ability to balance elite-level personal goals with deep engagement in education, leadership, and family life is a powerful reflection of the values at the heart of our profession.

I had the honor of sitting down with Dr. Roberts to reminisce about his years of involvement in GLAO leadership and to explore the lessons he has learned along the way.

Questions by Brandon Shoukri; Answers by Dr. Chris Roberts

Tell me a little bit about how you first became involved with the Great Lakes Association of Orthodontics?

I was asked by Dr. Thomas Ahman, who is a former Speaker of the House for the AAO House of Delegates. Dr. Ahman practiced about 35 miles south of me and was a good friend and a colleague. He stopped me one day at a meeting and said, "You know what? You should do this. You should run for a delegate position from the Great Lakes Association of Orthodontists. You would enjoy it. You'd enjoy the people. You'd enjoy getting involved with the work." He said, "Yeah, you'll need to put your name in, usually you aren't elected the first time when you run for a delegate but throw your name in the hat." Well, lo and behold, I was elected the first time, and I did enjoy it very much. The people in the GLAO leadership are special, they're a great group. I enjoyed every minute of my involvement in GLAO.

How many years have you served on the GLAO?

Gosh, I think I started somewhere around 1995 or 1996 somewhere in there and served all until 2019, when I was officially president-elect of the AAO, and no longer the Trustee of the GLAO.

What were some of the biggest challenges the GLAO faced in its earlier decades, or maybe talked a little bit about the time that you were there?

The GLAO has changed considerably, just in my tenure. It used to be, way back when, you had to present cases to be a member of the GLAO. You had to attend a GLAO meeting before they would let you into the GLAO, that all changed, as time went on.

Some of the challenges are the typical challenges in any association: especially membership retention. Some people don't see the value in organized orthodontics, and want to drop their membership, and they certainly have the right to do so. So, a challenge would be to continue to educate all orthodontists in what the GLAO does, and that no one can do it like we do. Collectively, there are things that we can do that individual orthodontists cannot do. So, I think a big challenge is just educating orthodontists of the value of organized orthodontics and how we are advocates for our specialty.

Tell me how member expectations in orthodontics, or in the GLAO, have changed from when you were serving to now.

I don't know if member expectations have changed much, but just the whole aspect of associations has changed. The Great Lakes Association of Orthodontists started 100 years ago so that orthodontists could have a meeting with their peers within one day driving distance. It was in the days before airplane travel was common and before the interstate highway system. People in the middle Great Lakes region had a place to go to for an annual meeting when the AAO annual meeting may have been somewhere very difficult to get to.

Now, there are so many different meetings to go to, whether it is a company's user group meeting, or that of the Facebook group. You can get continuing education online. It's not like you need to go to a meeting to get continuing education anymore. People used to go to meetings to see and talk to the vendors and look at the latest equipment. The communication with companies has changed drastically from what it was before. So, the purpose of having a meeting has changed, and I think the GLAO has seen that over time. A challenge the GLAO will have in the future will be keeping people interested in coming to the meetings. You need to have some type of draw or purpose for them to want to come, not just to meet their colleagues, but to hear the people that they want to listen to at the podium speaking and learn the latest information about our specialty. This will be a big challenge in the future.

What are ways that GLAO is supporting young orthodontists and residents entering the profession?

The GLAO has a lot of young people involved in leadership. This provides young orthodontists many great role models. When they come to GLAO meetings as a resident, they can see these individuals and relate to them. Hopefully, they will continue to want to come and join. Just by having a constant supply of new enthusiastic young leaders in the GLAO is a great benefit to our next generation of orthodontists.

How do you believe the GLAO has addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion within its membership and leadership the past, currently, present times?

When I was AAO president, I started the Inclusion Engagement Diversity Task Force. I asked the former chair at University of Michigan, Dr. Sunil Kapila, to be the first chair of the task force. So, on a national level, I think the AAO has done a very good job. On the GLAO level, I know that's something that the GLAO has looked into and is addressing.

Let's talk about the future, so I'm not going to ask you to look 100 years ahead, but we knew how much the GLAO has accomplished and what it's become the past 100 years. Let's look 10 to 15 years ahead. What do you think the GLAO should ideally look like?

I will look back a little bit. I think the very first meeting that I went to as a delegate, the topic was the redistricting of the AAO. How are we going to look into the future and be relevant, and they talked about taking the eight constituents of the AAO and realigning them, perhaps into four or six constituents instead of the current eight. That's been kicked around since I became involved, and we're still talking about it today.

The GLAO has to stay relevant to the new orthodontists, the new membership. The meetings have to be something that people want to go to. What will the GLAO look like? I don't know. It's up to those following after me to mold the GLAO into something that stays relevant with the times.

What would you say to a young orthodontist that just graduated who's on the fence about getting more involved?

I've often been asked why I spent so much time being involved in organized orthodontics. I tell people that I got involved because the work is important and somebody needs to do it, but I stayed involved because of the people that I got to know and work with, especially in the GLAO, but also at the AAO level. I would tell new residents coming out, if you had any inkling at all about being involved in organized orthodontics, the GLAO is a great place to meet some wonderful people to do a lot of good work to promote our specialty.

If you could hold a position on the GLAO board again, which position would you look forward to the most?

I absolutely loved my time as Trustee.

But, I had my turn. Now it's someone else's turn. I absolutely loved being trustee, having one foot in the GLAO and one foot in the AAO. It was a great run, and I don't regret a single minute of it. It took a lot of time. It took time away from practice and from the family. I was lucky that my wife traveled with me probably 95% of the time. That made a big difference. But if I could be Trustee again, I would absolutely love it.