

hearingyourbest.com

INFORMATION FROM Associated Audiologists, Inc. "Hearing Your Best for Life"



## Hearing Your Best

Spring/Summer 2022 • Vol. 22, Issue 1

HERE WE GROW AGAIN!

## Practice Expands to Lawrence

Associated Audiologists, Inc., is pleased to announce the purchase of the Marston Hearing Center, Lawrence, Kansas.

The Marston Hearing Center has specialized in providing audiological services in the Lawrence area since 1975 and was established by Dr. Larry Marston. Gerald Whiteside, Au.D., joined the center in 2003 and worked with Dr. Marston for two years before buying the practice in 2005. Dr. Whiteside is now retiring and is transitioning ownership to Associated Audiologists.

"We're very excited to have the opportunity to expand into the Lawrence community," said Tim Steele, Ph.D., President and CEO, Associated Audiologists. "Dr. Marston and Dr. Whiteside have a long history of providing quality audiology care to the residents of this area and we plan to continue that tradition."

In addition, many members of the Associated Audiologists team have deep ties to Lawrence and the University of Kansas.

"Several of our audiologists completed their undergraduate studies in speech pathology and audiology at KU, and their doctoral-level degrees at the University of Kansas-Medical Center," Dr. Steele said.

Dr. Steele added that David Paul, Au.D., will see patients at the Lawrence Clinic beginning June 9, 2022. Dr. Paul also will continue to care for patients at the Leavenworth Clinic, where he has been based for the past six years. Katelyn Waldeier, Au.D., also will be seeing patients in this clinic.

The Lawrence Clinic is located in the Lawrence Medical Plaza Building at 1112 West 6th Street, Suite 100 in Lawrence, and will remain in the same location.

To schedule an appointment at our new Lawrence Clinic, call 785-843-8479 or 855-547-8745. For more information about Associated Audiologists, visit hearingyourbest.com.





Winston Churchill once said, "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often." After all the change we've experienced in the past few years, I must admit it doesn't feel like perfection yet. However, I do believe that improvement requires change.

Associated Audiologists, Inc., like the profession of audiology, has experienced significant change in the past 12-24 months. There are many examples including increased coverage of hearing aids/services under health insurance, third party administrator plans, over-the-counter hearing aid regulations coming from the FDA, and post-pandemic demand for quality audiology care.

We are also experiencing growth within our practice. As mentioned in the newsletter, we are welcoming new employees and two new audiologists, Katelyn Waldeier and Katie Rhoads, who graduated in May.

We are also excited about expanding through the acquisition of Marston Hearing Center in Lawrence, Kansas. This clinic was originally started by one of my audiology professors, Dr. Larry Marston, then was transitioned to my colleague and previous student, Dr. Gerald Whiteside, who is now retiring. Change and growth can feel unsettling when you are in the midst of uncertainty but none of us can stop the forward march of time and progress.

You'll see in this newsletter a brief mention of my great-great grandparents who met in Leavenworth, Kansas after my grandfather served in the Union Army. They homesteaded the family farm I was raised on and where my mother still lives. Imagine the change they must have experienced as they navigated a post-Civil War society and homesteaded in an unpredictable remote farm environment.

That pioneer spirit and undaunting courage to embrace change, growth, and uncertainty are characteristics that can inspire us all. It might help me to remember that regardless of how difficult something might seem, it can't be as difficult as what they encountered on the Kansas prairie. The Kansas state motto, "Ad aspera per astra,"—to the stars through difficulty, seems to summarize the grit required to handle what comes our way.

## **Externs Join Practice**





**Katelyn Waldeier, Au.D.,** and **Katherine (Katie) Rhoads, Au.D.,** who recently served as externs with Associated Audiologists, have now joined the practice.

Both Dr. Waldeier and Dr. Rhoads recently graduated from the University of Kansas-Medical Center with their Doctorate of Audiology degrees.

Dr. Waldeier received her undergraduate degree in communication sciences and disorders from Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas.

During her externship, Dr. Waldeier focused on diagnostic hearing testing and hearing aid technology. She enjoys assisting her patients with hearing aid technology that helps them connect and communicate better with family and friends.

"I like establishing relationships with our patients and their families," Dr. Waldeier said. "I get to help them think through their problems and the possible solutions. It's like solving a puzzle."

Dr. Waldeier is originally from Tonganoxie, Kansas. Today, she resides in Overland Park. Away from work, she spends time with her fiancé, Justin, plays rugby, and cheers on the Kansas City Chiefs.

Dr. Rhoads received her undergraduate degree in speech-language-hearing: sciences and disorders from the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

While in college, she participated in research on how hearing loss impacts cognitive resources and contributes to mental fatigue. With that background, she is always looking for ways to utilize hearing aids as tools to help patients reduce strain, improve communication and hear their best.

"The technology we have available to us now is an incredible tool to help our patients," Dr. Rhoads said. "We also are committed to using best practices at Associated Audiologists, such as real-ear measures. Those practices are critical to helping us verify that we're delivering the best care possible for our patients."

Dr. Rhoads was born and raised in Lawrence, Kansas. She now lives in Kansas City, Missouri, near the City Market area with her husband, Dustin, and their two cats. They like cooking and exploring area restaurants, and Dr. Rhoads enjoys spending time at the Nelson-Atkins Museum.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Waldeier or Dr. Rhoads, call 855-547-8745.

"At any one time, we had 2,000 to 3,000 troops moving through the base, coming and going from their missions. Our job was to take care of any healthcare needs they had while with us."

— David Paul, Au.D.



# Dr. Paul Returns to Leavenworth Clinic after Year-Long Deployment

For the past six years, David Paul, Au.D., audiologist, has served our Leavenworth Clinic patients, caring for their hearing healthcare needs, developing relationships with them, and becoming involved in the community through the Lions Club.

What you may not know though is that Dr. Paul is also a Major in the United States Army Reserves, an important role in which he serves our troops and our nation.

Like many people, Dr. Paul joined the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in college. It helped with the cost of his education and provided him with leadership training.

At the time, he wasn't sure about his civilian career path, but during his first deployment to Iraq, he became interested in audiology. After returning home, he was accepted into the audiology program at the University of Kansas, even performing his externship with the practice.

Now he's not only an audiologist, but he's advanced to the rank of Major in the Reserves. In addition to his deployment to Iraq, during his 21-year military career, he's been deployed to the Dominican Republic, and most recently to Ft. Hood, Texas.



The Ft. Hood Mission

Though Dr. Paul's job with the Army Reserves is with the Medical Service

Corps, it's very different from the work he does as an audiologist.

At Ft. Hood, he served as the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of the 7406 Troop Medical Clinic (TMC) from November 2020 to December 2021. "As the officer-in-charge, I was in a planning and operations role, rather than providing hands-on care," Dr. Paul explained.

The unit he was in charge of consisted of a diverse group of medical professionals which included combat medics, nurses, physicians, dentists and dental technicians, preventive medicine personnel, and even an audiologist. The unit's mission was to provide primary and specialty healthcare services to soldiers who were mobilizing or demobilizing to or from overseas missions.

That included the unique requirements related to the COVID-19 pandemic, performing COVID-19 lab testing for soldiers and units who were traveling overseas, as well as managing the COVID-19 isolation barracks at North Ft. Hood.

"Like everyone, we faced the challenges of staffing during a pandemic," Dr. Paul said. "Over the course of the year, we tested 25,000 soldiers for COVID and at any one time had 40 to 100 in isolation."

During his deployment, Dr. Paul enjoyed tackling a new challenge, meeting people from all over the nation and leading a medical team focused on the troops' needs. "I had wonderful colleagues on this mission, just like I have here. I was very fortunate," Dr. Paul said.

He also enjoyed seeing a few familiar faces. "It's a small world in the

Army," he added. "You sometimes run into people you met years ago, thousands of miles away."

#### **Home Sweet Home**

As his team's mission came to an end in December 2021, Dr. Paul said it was good to head back to his family, his home and his patients.

"I was very fortunate because I was here in the states and my wife, Courtney, daughter, Madeline, and dog, Hope, were able to come visit a few times," Dr. Paul said. "Plus, technology made it much easier to stay in touch than in the past."

But even technology can't overcome the longing to be back home. "When I returned, it felt good to be back in Kansas, to sleep in my own bed, to drive down my own street and to be with my family, especially at the holidays."

Now he's back in the Leavenworth Clinic, reconnecting with his patients and looking forward to some new challenges with Associated Audiologists.

"I have always been interested in vestibular audiology, and after training, I'll be assisting with those patients as needed," he explained.

"I like that dizziness and balance problems require a different set of testing," Dr. Paul said. "I enjoy the variety, and in some cases, we can treat a patient and help them immediately. That's very rewarding."

Please join us in welcoming
Dr. Paul back home! To schedule
an appointment with him in
the Leavenworth Clinic, call
913-682-1870, or in the Lawrence
Clinic, call 785-843-8479.



### Legislative Update

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is in the process of establishing the rules for over-the-counter hearing aids. Stacey Baldwin, Au.D., our Legislative Coordinator, is a member of the Academy of Doctors of Audiology Advocacy Board, and Dana Jacobson, Au.D., Overland Park Clinic Manager, serves on the Kansas Board of Hearing Aid Examiners. Along with Tim Steele, Ph.D., President and CEO of Associated Audiologists and who was on the ADA board of directors, all have participated in reviewing the proposed rule and have submitted recommendations that consider evidence-based practices while supporting consumer choice and protection.

In addition, the Kansas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (KHSA), for whom Dr. Baldwin is the legislative liaison, recently worked on legislation that was passed in the Kansas Senate (SB 343), and signed by Gov. Laura Kelly on April 18.

KSHA found several areas that could be improved upon and submitted proponent testimony, suggesting several amendments to update outdated terminology, such as changing "hard of hearing" to "hearing impairment."





Dr. Jacobson



Dr. Steele





**Leaders in Audiological Care for Hearing, Tinnitus and Balance Disorders.** 

## Dr. Smittkamp Helps Steve Crusinberry Overcome Tinnitus

At 59 years old, Steve Crusinberry is a self-described "type A" personality. Retired from the United States Army after 23 years, he's now the deputy garrison commander at Ft. Riley, Kan., a civilian position. During his military career, he has been exposed to loud noises and blasts, experiencing temporary ringing in his ears that has always gone away...until Aug. 19, 2020.

That's when Steve was wrapping up a practice session at a firing range. "I decided to fire off one more round and forgot that I had removed my hearing protection," Steve explained. "As soon as I squeezed the trigger, I realized something was wrong."

Immediately, Steve began hearing a very loud, high-pitched "bing" that never stopped. Over the next few weeks, he went to see a number of doctors and audiologists in the Manhattan area who diagnosed him with tinnitus.

"Everyone told me it would probably go away, and that in the meantime, I would just have to learn to live with it," Steve said.

Not satisfied with those answers, Steve decided to search the internet himself for more information. "After reading a bunch of stuff online, I realized my tinnitus might never go away, and I didn't take that very well," Steve admitted.

Fortunately, when he saw the Associated Audiologists team in Manhattan, they recognized how bothersome Steve's tinnitus was, and recommended he see Susan Smittkamp, Au.D., Ph.D., an expert in tinnitus management who sees patients in the practice's Shawnee Mission Clinic.

Steve scheduled a specialized appointment with Dr. Smittkamp, but in the interim, his condition continued to decline.

"My emotional and mental health had really started to deteriorate at this point," Steve said. "I hadn't slept for months. I would fall into a bad state of sleep, then I would wake up and it would just be me and this very loud 'bing' that never stopped."

To the world, Steve seemed fine. "I soldiered on and went to work. I didn't let many people know what was going on inside me, but at that point, I had cried so many tinnitus tears, I was an absolute train wreck!" Steve admitted.

"I remember lying in bed one night and telling my wife, I can't go on anymore.' I had a terrible sense of hopelessness and despair."



Tinnitus is usually caused by damage to the auditory system. It's the perception of sound in the absence of an external sound source. It can take on any number of characteristics and is usually a sound that only the individual can hear.

Some people experience tinnitus that varies from soft to loud and from low to high pitched. Some describe their tinnitus as a buzzing, clicking, ringing, white noise, and/or roaring sound. Steve described his tinnitus as a very high-pitched "sonar" sound.



## ASSOCIATED AUDIOLOGISTS

## **Leaders in Audiological Care for Hearing, Tinnitus and Balance Disorders.**

#### **Hope for Help**

At Steve's first appointment with Dr. Smittkamp in November 2020, he said he could barely talk, but he could listen.

"Right off the bat, Dr. Smittkamp gave me hope," Steve said. "Her demeanor was very calming and she was confident if I followed the treatment plan, I would be OK."

"Steve was extremely open minded about anything I suggested he try," Dr. Smittkamp said. "Many people just want a quick fix for their tinnitus, but there isn't one. It takes a lot of hard work and commitment to have a good outcome, and Steve was willing to do that."

One of the first things Dr. Smittkamp suggested he try were ear-level sound generators. "Steve wears devices that provide a sound stimulus that blends with his tinnitus," Dr. Smittkamp explained. "The sound is very relaxing and a nice substitution for most people with tinnitus."

"I didn't like the sound generators at first but I kept adjusting the volume," Steve said. "Dr. Smittkamp said I needed to leave the volume alone. Now that I am used to them, I hear these calming chimes instead of the tinnitus. It's very comforting."

#### Steve 2.0

For Steve, wearing the ear-level sound generators was just the first step in managing his tinnitus.

Dr. Smittkamp made recommendations for daily meditation, journaling, doing concentration exercises, seeing a counselor, and establishing a healthy sleep environment. His primary care provider prescribed an anti-anxiety medication that helped him sleep and he added in a daily walking routine to the mix, trying to work in 15,000 steps a day.

"All of the things Dr. Smittkamp suggested were outside my comfort zone, like meditation and journaling, but I was desperate for help and I'm good at following orders, so I did what she told me to do," he said.

"Many people don't see how the meditation or relaxation exercises can help. But stress can make tinnitus worse. If you follow an established tinnitus management protocol like Steve did, it works," Dr. Smittkamp said.

Steve agreed and said though the transformation wasn't immediate, after a couple of months, he could see an improvement in how he responded to the tinnitus, and to life in general.

"Steve made some significant lifestyle changes that were a huge part of his success," Dr. Smittkamp said. "He is a nice example of someone who had a really high level of tinnitus disturbance, but who has had a good outcome thanks to all his efforts."

"Everything worked together to not only help manage the tinnitus, but to help me become a better version of myself," Steve said. "My wife calls me Steve 2.0."

#### **Graduation Day**

Over the next several months, Steve continued to work with Dr. Smittkamp and his other providers at regularly scheduled appointments, implementing his tinnitus management plan. He met every goal he set, but best of all, he was done shedding those tinnitus tears.

"At those appointments, we would talk about how I was doing, and I would set new goals to reach by my next appointment," Steve said. "Dr. Smittkamp would encourage me to keep up the hard work, count my wins and think about things from a more positive perspective."

Then in November 2021, nearly one year after he started working with

her, Dr. Smittkamp told him he had officially graduated from the tinnitus treatment program. He didn't need to see her anymore.

"I have to admit I was a little disappointed to hear that because Associated Audiologists and Dr. Smittkamp have become such an important part of my life," he said.

Of course, her door is always open if Steve needs help again. After all, Steve's tinnitus isn't gone. "My tinnitus is still here. It's intermittent—some days it's worse than others, but I no longer have an emotional connection to it. And if it does get worse, that's a sign that I need to relax," he explained.

"I needed a holistic approach to work through this problem and I had to put a lot of preconceived notions I had aside to make this successful. This just shows if you can be disciplined in your process, you will get better."

Dr. Smittkamp agreed. "There is nothing that I have in my back pocket that will make someone's tinnitus go away, but we can separate the disturbance from the awareness, which is what we've done for Steve. He's learned to push it to the background."

Going forward, Steve plans to continue following his tinnitus treatment plan, including the healthy lifestyle changes he's made.

"I'm living my best life now," Steve said. "I hate this ringing in my ears, but honestly, I wouldn't change a thing. I'm glad it happened to me. It opened my eyes to a whole new world out there that I did not know existed until I had to work through it myself."

And for anyone else struggling with bothersome tinnitus, Steve said you can overcome it too with help.

"I honestly thought my life was over until I met Dr. Smittkamp," Steve said. "I am grateful for her and Associated Audiologists. They literally saved my life."



## Happy 25th Anniversary Tanja!

They say time flies when you're having fun, and that's certainly been the case for senior administrative assistant Tanja Porter.

"I'm now officially the oldest member of the Associated Audiologists staff," Tanja said. "It used to be Larry Ruder. How did this happen?" she laughed.

Tanja joined Associated Audiologists 25 years ago on April 14, 1997, working in the practice's Olathe Clinic, then owned by Dr. Jim Wise and his wife, Carody. Her co-workers included Kim Young, Tim Steele, Ph.D., and Linda Erickson, Au.D.



At the time, the practice had one other location in Prairie Village.

"I came to Associated Audiologists with five years of experience in a physical therapy practice and 10 years working in banking," Tanja said. "I've always enjoyed working in a customer service role."

Tanja stayed at the Olathe Clinic until it closed in 2008, then she moved to the new Shawnee Mission Clinic for a few years, finally transitioning to Overland Park in 2013. Over the years, Tanja has worked at the front desk in all the Associated Audiologists clinics, checking patients in and out and filling in for vacationing staff.

She's seen technology dramatically evolve and watched the practice grow by leaps and bounds, but one thing has never changed.

"I have always had a customer service role," she said. "One of the greatest pleasures I have is getting to visit with our patients, sharing their joys and sorrows," Tanja said. "I feel like my life has been greatly enriched by working at Associated Audiologists. I couldn't be prouder to be part of this team."

Tanja and her husband, Alvin, reside in Overland Park and have two adult sons. When not helping patients, Tanja enjoys traveling, reading, knitting, crocheting, and jewelry making.

The next time you are in our Overland Park Clinic, be sure to congratulate her on her 25th anniversary with the practice. Thank you for your service Tanja and for taking great care of our patients!

#### **MEET OUR NEW STAFF!**



MEREDITH joined the Associated Audiologists Overland Park team in October 2021. "I have enjoyed every

moment with the practice," she said. "While I am fairly new to Associated Audiologists, I am no stranger to the field of audiology and love that I get to continue in the endeavor to make sure everyone is hearing their best."

Meredith said when she's not in the office, she is typically at the theatre, or hanging out with her cat.



**MAEGAN** is the new administrative assistant with the practice's Kansas City North location. She started in December

2021."I have loved every minute so far," she said. In the past, she worked as a librarian for Liberty and the surrounding communities, as well as a receptionist for an animal hospital.

Outside of work, she enjoys reading or spending time with her family, which includes two scruffy pups, Gabriel and Tipper.



**TERESA** came on board this winter and is an administrative assistant in our Overland Park Clinic. She has more than

20 years of front office experience working in medical practices.

Teresa resides in Olathe, Kansas with her husband. The couple has four adult children, one son-in-law and five grandchildren. Teresa is a self-described "foodie," who also loves traveling and gardening. She also has one four-legged child, a pup named Kayla.

Welcome to all our new team members!

## How Earwax Can Literally Plug Your Ears Up

Everyone has earwax, better known in the medical world as cerumen. In fact, earwax serves an important purpose. The glands inside your ear canals secrete the substance, and it looks different for different individuals. For most, it's yellowish or honey-colored, or sometimes grayish, and it can be sticky or dry.

Its job is to protect your outer ear and ear canal, trapping dust and dirt, and keeping debris from traveling down your ear canal. It also can stop unhealthy bacteria from growing in the ear.

Unfortunately, you can have too much of a good thing—some people's bodies just produce more earwax than others. Plus, some medications, exercise or stress can cause your body to make more earwax. Your body also produces more earwax as you get older, and some individuals who wear hearing aids may produce more earwax.

#### **How to Remove Earwax Naturally**

Though we may think we have to "swab" earwax out of our ears, it often works its way out by itself. Earwax is constantly being transported out of the ear canal to the ear opening. Chewing and jaw motion assist with this natural cleaning process. Once the wax reaches the outer ear, it dries, flakes, and falls out.

But several generations have been taught keeping our ears clean requires some extra help in the form of cotton swabs. Audiologists agree using cotton swabs to clean the ear canal is not a good idea. They can push the wax deeper into the ear canal, rather than removing it. Instead follow these tips:

- Use a warm, moist wash cloth to clean the outside of your ears.
- NEVER put anything in the ear canal, especially sharp objects, like toothpicks or hair pins. Not only

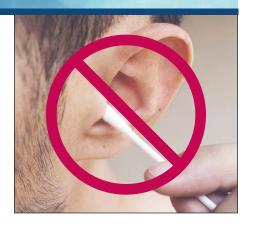
- can you push the ear wax further into the canal, but you could potentially puncture the eardrum.
- ▶ NEVER use ear candles or "candling" to try to remove earwax. The Food and Drug Administration has issued safety warnings regarding this home remedy and it could result in a serious injury.
- Many of the "as seen on TV" options for wax removal are not recommended and in some cases are not safe. Avoid these.

#### When a Washcloth Doesn't Work

Sometimes, a washcloth doesn't work to get the wax out of your ears, but more difficult-to-remove earwax usually responds to home treatments that soften wax. In some cases it may be safe and effective to use an at-home kit. However, it's always important to check with your audiologist or healthcare provider first to ensure there are no structural abnormalities that would prevent you from using these options. Also, some of these remedies can inadvertently irritate the sensitive skin of the ear canal.

Though it's not common, if you have impacted earwax that's close to your eardrum, it could affect your hearing and cause temporary hearing loss or dizziness. Audiologists and doctors call this impacted earwax. Here are some symptoms of impacted earwax:

- Dull earache
- Feeling of plugged hearing or fullness in the ear
- Partial hearing loss that gets worse
- Tinnitus, ringing, or noises in the ear
- Itching, odor, or discharge
- Coughing
- Pain
- Infection



If you have any of these symptoms, check with your audiologist or doctor to see if you might have excess or impacted earwax.

If you do, an audiologist or another medical professional might need to inspect your ear canals and if necessary, may either remove the earwax by washing it out, or by manually removing it using suction or special instruments under lighted magnification.

Manual wax removal is preferred if your ear canal is narrow, the eardrum has a perforation or tube, other methods have failed, or if you have skin problems affecting the ear canal, diabetes or a weakened immune system.

Remember, never put any objects, even cotton swabs, in your ears. You risk pushing the wax down your ear canal and could even perforate the eardrum, a problem that might require surgery.

If you are prone to repeated wax impaction or use hearing aids, consider seeing your audiologist every six to 12 months for a check-up and routine preventive cleaning. In addition, audiologists carry special products and over-the-counter solutions for cerumen management that are safe and specific for self-use

If you have, drainage or bleeding, see your audiologist or physician immediately. These are not symptoms of earwax impaction, and require physician referral to be evaluated.

### **Red Scarf Reminder**

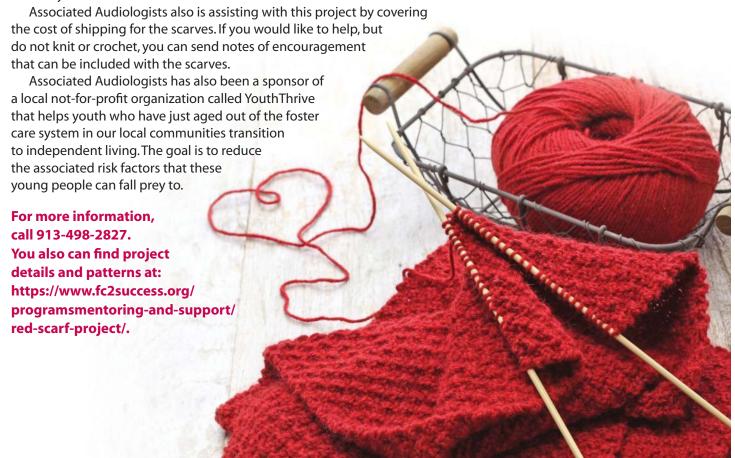
Since 2015, our patients and staff have contributed nearly 400 hand-made red scarves to the Red Scarf Project, a multi-faceted charity program that benefits foster youth once they "age out" of the system and go to college. The organization accepts donations of hand-knitted or crocheted red scarves, which are given to the college-age students on Valentine's Day each year.

If you'd like to contribute, scarves are due this year by Dec. 1, 2022, and can be dropped off at any of our seven clinics. If you miss the Dec. 1 deadline, don't worry. We'll continue to collect scarves throughout the year and will include yours with our next donation.



We are on a mission:

To improve lives through comprehensive audiology care.



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## Steele Family's Roots Tied to Leavenworth

Dr. Steele's great-great grandfather, Samuel Benton Steele, was born in Warsaw, New York in 1836. He served as a Quartermaster for the Union Army at Leavenworth, Kansas. Later he was Provost Marshall. He wore rags to hide the fact that he was carrying the servicemen's payroll during the Civil War.

He lived in Leavenworth for a time where he met Dr. Steele's great-great grandmother, Harriet Grover, who had been raised on a homestead in Pottawatomie County outside of Onaga, Kansas. After their marriage in 1865, they moved and homesteaded a section of land that is now part of the Steele Ranch southwest of Waterville, Kansas.

They had six children, two who survived, the youngest being Dr. Steele's great grandfather, Charles Guy Steele. Dr. Steele was raised on this family farm where his mother, Treva Steele, resides today. Dr. Steele is proud of his roots that are tied to Leavenworth and the Fort.

