

A Sculptor of the Human Spirit

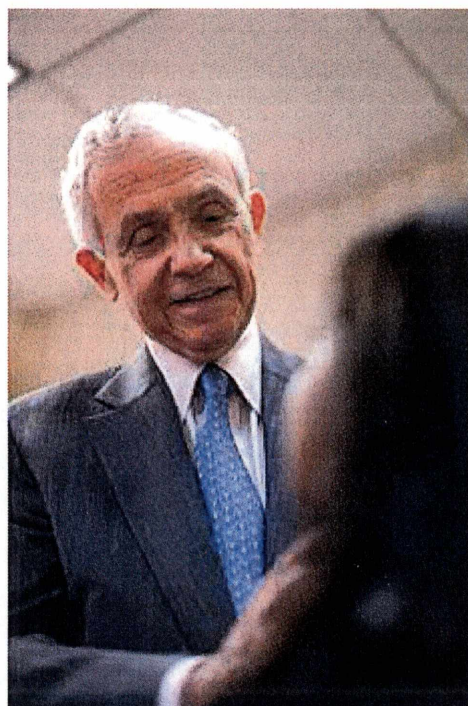
To Dr. Joseph McCarthy, the Most Beautiful Face Is a Smiling One

Dr. Joseph McCarthy still vividly recalls a spring day from his childhood in New England when he spotted a boy wearing a Red Sox baseball cap, his face severely deformed. "What's wrong?" young Joseph asked his grandmother. "Joe," she replied, "it's God's will." That day may or may not have marked the actual beginning of Dr. McCarthy's career trajectory, but it certainly helped shape his view that when nature errs, science can intervene and sometimes come to the rescue.

Dr. McCarthy, the recipient of this year's Master Clinician award at Dean's Honors Day, has been director of NYU Langone Medical Center's Institute of Reconstructive Plastic Surgery (IRPS) for 30 years. Treating some 3,000 patients a year, most of them with birth defects, the institute is the largest plastic surgery unit in the country. Dr. McCarthy, the Lawrence D. Bell Professor of Plastic Surgery, has trained more than 100 residents and 25 fellows in craniofacial surgery, some now directors of plastic surgery units at more than 20 academic medical centers around the world. After graduating from Harvard University in 1960, Dr. McCarthy earned his MD from Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. He completed a residency in surgery at Columbia and one in plastic surgery at NYU Langone, joining our faculty in 1973.

One in 400 children is born with a facial difference—their features arrayed so imperfectly that their eyesight and speech, even breathing and digestion, are jeopardized. In addition to these health issues, there are emotional ones that are in some ways even more devastating. Many teachers wrongly assume that these children are developmentally delayed or disabled. Many employers discriminate against these people, forcing a disproportionately high number of them to work night jobs. Many parents are so distraught by their child's misfortune that they make it their own, letting it destroy their marriage. As a result, these children often become social outcasts, alienated when they're most in need of love, attention, and friendship. Not surprisingly, many of them grow up to become nurses, psychologists, or social workers.

The lucky ones find their way to Dr. McCarthy and his world-renowned team of plastic surgeons, neurosurgeons, orthodontists, prosthodontists, ophthalmologists, otolaryngologists, geneticists, psychologists, social workers, and nurse practitioners. "We take care of



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every child who comes to us," he explains, "in one way or another. That's our policy." The institute's clinical and research efforts are made possible, in large part, by support from the National Foundation for Facial Reconstruction, which helped to found the IRPS and has supported it since its inception. The foundation recently gave a \$4 million grant to the institute to support the design and construction of a new state-of-the-art clinical facility.

Dr. McCarthy introduced the concept of surgical reconstruction of the face as early as infancy to avoid the psychological trauma that arises during childhood and adolescence. He also pioneered craniofacial distraction, a procedure that involves strategically cutting facial bones, then pulling them apart with a special device that's screwed into the bones and turned one millimeter a day for about three months. As the bones are moved apart, new bone forms in the spaces created. For his contributions to the field, Dr. McCarthy has been honored with the highest awards conferred by the American Association of Plastic Surgeons, the American Society of Maxillofacial Surgeons, and many other professional organizations. He is also founding chair of the Medical Advisory Board of Smile Train, an organization that has provided pro bono surgery for over 300,000 children with cleft lip/palate worldwide. He has published four textbooks and many scientific articles on the subject.

Dr. McCarthy says he looks forward to the day when doctors will be able to lessen the incidence of severe facial deformity. Until then, he draws inspiration from the past, from the words of a 16th-century Italian plastic surgeon, Gaspari Tagliacozzi. His compassionate wisdom forms the heart of the IRPS's mission statement: "We restore, repair, and make whole those parts . . . which nature has given but which fortune has taken away—not so much that they may delight the eye, but that they may buoy up the spirit."