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• Special to the Daily Leader In today's times, she would make the "short list" of those who share her distinction of longevity. But, there is nothing "short" about the dedication she has shown for the past 50 years to the field of medicine.



"For a number of years, until the Estradas (Drs. Ed and Lina Estrada) came to town, I was the only pediatrician here," Dr. Charlotte Seago said. "Several times I was greeted on returning from a trip with the nurses saying, 'Dr. Seago, don't ever leave town again.'" Seago has been practicing medicine for 50 years with 43 of those years being in the Liberal community. She recently attended her 50-year reunion at the Indiana University School of Medicine, where she was among the graduates of 1960.

"I completed my internship in St. Paul, Minn., and then returned to Indianapolis to Indiana University for two years of pediatric residency," Seago said, adding that she followed up her residency with a one-year fellowship in infectious diseases in Oklahoma City.

It was during her stint in Oklahoma City that she met her husband, Don.

"He was my flight instructor," she said. "I believe it was in 1964 – I had thought about learning to fly for some time and had reached a point in my life when I didn't have to take night calls and had a little more money than I had ever had before. So, that is how I decided to spend it."

According to Seago, the dashing flight instructor invited her to join him and a group of others one night for dinner.

"He then invited me to go to the movies – we went to a Bob Hope movie and took my Volkswagon," she said, adding with a chuckle, "He drove and parked in a restricted parking area. My Volkswagon was towed, and we had to go to the impound lot to get it out. I married him anyway."

The two dated for awhile and Seago did get her pilot's license.

"After my one-year fellowship in Oklahoma City, I went to work at a clinic in Crossville, Tenn.," she said. "While I was in Tennessee, Don and I were married in 1965."

The couple moved to Wichita in 1966.

"Our daughter, Kelly, was born while we were living there," Seago said. "I worked for several months at what was then the Sedgwick County Hospital."

Their move to Liberal came in 1967, where their son, Tom was born.

“We considered moving here because Don’s parents, Tommie and Alma Seago, lived here – they had lived in Liberal for several years,” she said. “Don had some aviation opportunities here, and I discovered there was no pediatrician here at that time.”

It wasn’t easy to get started here.

“The other physicians were cordial to my coming here, but there was no clinic or group to join and no one offered any incentives to start here,” Seago said. “So, I borrowed a few hundred dollars from a local bank and started from scratch.”

Her choice to enter the medical field came naturally – her mother was a nurse.

“As a young child I thought I wanted to be a nurse as my mother was,” she said, adding with a laugh, “Later, I think I decided I would rather give orders than take them.”

“I was in high school when I decided on medicine,” she continued. “I became a physician because I wanted to do something useful for people rather than just satisfying my own desires.”

According to Seago, she chose pediatrics because she soon discovered she “really liked” working with children – especially babies.

“I didn’t like geriatrics nearly as much,” she added. “And, I trust I have made a difference in the lives of children in the Liberal area while I have been here.”

She feels what she has done over the years has, all-in-all, been a very rewarding experience.

“As technology and training evolved and the opportunity to transfer out premature and sick newborns became available, it was rewarding to frequently be complimented by neonatologists and transport teams on having babies stabilized and ready for transport by the time the team arrived here to pick them up,” Seago said. “It is always rewarding to see children recover from serious illnesses. Children are resilient and with help usually recover from conditions more devastating to older individuals.”

Seago’s husband, who worked in aviation, died in 2001. The couple had been married for 36 years.

“My daughter, Kelly, lives in Oak Park, Ill., where she is a criminal defense attorney,” Seago said. “My son, Tom, lives in San Francisco and is a computer software architect, currently working with cell phone technology. I also have a step-grandson living in southern California.”

Seago is now leaving Liberal after recently announcing her plans to hang up her stethoscope and retire from the medical field.

What does the future hold for her?

“As soon as I can decide what to take with me and get my house cleared out, I plan to move to Greenville, Ill.,” she said. “It is a college town 50 miles east of St. Louis, where I graduated from Greenville College a long time ago. I will then be within easier reach of my sisters who are in Indiana and Illinois and my daughter in Chicago. I have really enjoyed traveling internationally recently and hope to do more of this, also.”

She will also have time to work on another passion she has developed over the years – photography.

“I will continue to work on photography,” she said. “I like to edit photos and need to organize all of my old photos. I have been interested in photography for a long time.”

Seago said she began taking photographs as a child on her “Brownie” camera, but her love of photography really took off after going on her honeymoon in Florida with Don, where they both took a lot of photos.

Today, Seago said, she is mainly “behind the camera, not in front of it.”

A retirement party is planned for 5:30 to 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Rock Island Depot. The community is invited to come and wish Dr. Seago well in her future endeavors and travels.

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