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MONTEREY BAY

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HAVEN

FERTILE HISTORY

A mother's death, a family's legacy and how the past is always present at Holman K



DAVID T. MORWOOD, MD, FACS

Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery
VIP Concierge Service

665 MUNRAS AVE, SUITE 210, MONTEREY, CA
DRMORWOOD.COM
(831) 646-8661



David

By Kathryn McKenzie | Photos by Vern Fisher

MORWOOD

Just like a superhero with a secret identity, Dr. David Morwood slips into another guise several nights a week. But at least he doesn't have to don tights and a cape — instead, he picks up a pair of drumsticks.

Morwood, a plastic surgeon with a thriving practice in Monterey, would seem to have enough on his plate already. But he also is an experienced musician who has been the house drummer for a local lounge for 16 years, where the jazz faithful gather to jam or just enjoy.

"I love to play," said Morwood, who began studying violin at age 4 but switched to the drums a few years later. "I love to operate, and I love to play gigs."

The soft-spoken Morwood, who previously lived in New York City, discovered the Monterey Peninsula when he came out to the West Coast to run in the Big Sur Marathon. He opened his practice in Monterey in 1991. "I thought, it has all the beauty of New England but with better weather," said the Vermont native.

Not only did he find a more temperate climate, but also like-minded musical souls.

"It is really remarkable, the number of fine musicians that live here," said Morwood, who plays with a trio or quartet Friday and Saturday nights at the Hyatt Regency Monterey's Fireplace Lounge, and also co-hosts a monthly Sunday afternoon jam session with local favorite Lee Durley. Occasionally Morwood plays on Thursday nights, too.

He's also performed at numerous other venues around the Monterey Peninsula, as a youth at the White House with the Naval Academy drum and bugle corps, and at a nationally televised National League Football game.

At first glance, it doesn't seem that plastic surgery and jazz have much in common. But Morwood points out that there are some similarities between the two disciplines.

"Both of them require creativity. They're both about molding and shaping," he said.

Music has always been part of Morwood's life. He's been playing drums professionally since age 13, and he's never stopped playing, even through medical school, fellowships in cosmetic and microsurgery, and his current demanding schedule as a surgeon.

"I practice every day that I don't have a gig," said Morwood, who said he's constantly working to become a better drummer. He studies with renowned jazz drummer Kenny Washington, "who is incredibly hard on me, and has really helped me a lot."

The money Morwood earns from gigs and selling CDs helps fund yet another important aspect of his life — medical missions to repair cleft lips and cleft palates, a problem in Third World countries where prenatal nutrition is poor and leads to birth defects. Morwood works with Rotaplast International and Alliance for Smiles, and has traveled to Asia, Central and South America to perform surgeries.

"It takes maybe an hour and 15 minutes to fix a cleft lip, two hours for a cleft palate," said Morwood. "It really takes no time at all, and it can turn their lives around."

What Morwood enjoys almost as much as playing is the chance to meet some of the big names in the business. He's played with George Benson, Branford Marsalis and James Williams, among others; on one memorable occasion, Wynton Marsalis sat in at the Hyatt with Morwood and his band.

"I saw him get his trumpet out, but I thought he was just showing it to someone," recalls Morwood, until Marsalis came up on stage and began to play.

Drumming is an escape valve for Morwood, a stress reliever and something that he can't imagine not doing.

"Like they say, fun flies when you're keeping time," he said with a smile.

Information:

www.drmorwood.com and Monterey.hyatt.com.

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