

Dr. Ed Ashwood

Focusing on the Patient

by Janine Creager

Before Dr. Edward Ashwood, ARUP Laboratories president and CEO, ever put on a pathology lab coat, he was wearing cowboy boots and was downright comfortable in them.

“I really did grow up on my family’s ranch in Colorado, [which was] owned by my grandparents,” he says. “I spent 13 summers there. Even in college and medical school, I would spend summers at the ranch. I was truly a cowboy.” Those summer months were spent herding cattle, repairing farm equipment, irrigating and mending fences. It was hard work for the young Ashwood, but a very rewarding time for him.

“It taught me what hard work is all about,” he says. The hard work also taught him self-reliance and teamwork. “The ranch was about 40 miles from town so if something broke down, you had to fix it. When you’re herding cattle, you have to rely on your teammates to take their cows to the next pasture without getting them riled up—[to move them] in a calm and deliberate fashion. That experience shaped me more than anything.”

While the influence of ranching came from his mother’s side of the family, it was his father’s example, as a lab technician, which led him to his chosen career path.

“At nine years old, I knew that I wanted to work in a clinical lab,” says Ashwood, who remembers reading lab results side-by-side his father. “In high school, I wanted to be a pathologist, because I knew that they directed the lab. Most people decide they want to be doctors then decide what they want to specialize in.” Ashwood, however, chose the opposite route, identifying his specialty first.

After completing his undergraduate degree in chemical engineering and his medical education in Colorado, Ashwood completed a laboratory medicine residency at the University of Washington in Seattle. He then chose to stay on at the university to begin his career. It was while he was there, as he says, “working my career, happy as a clam,” that he learned of an opportunity at the University of Utah and ARUP Laboratories that would change his life.

This new lab, he says, “was smaller than the lab I was at, but had much more potential. I came and looked . . . and Salt Lake City won.” When Ashwood made the move in 1985, ARUP employed 100 people. Twenty-five years later, that number has increased to 2,800.

“I like to think that we helped it grow,” he says.

Looking back over those years, Ashwood is most proud of two things: the academics and the quality of the patient care they are able to provide.

“It is a very interesting business model,” says Ashwood of the approach ARUP employs in the industry. “Being owned by the [University of Utah] lets us focus on the patient, [which is] a very powerful business strategy.” When you focus on what you do best and do it in a cost-effective manner, he says, that helps your clients be cost effective, and your business will succeed.

“I kind of knew where I was going from a young age and it’s all worked out,” he says of that early decision. “I never dreamed that we would be so successful, but we have been. It’s been wonderful.”