Michael Last, MD

Of Masts and Sails and Scalpels

By: Deborah Liv Johnson

Newport to Ensenada 2005 race crew. From left, Dr. Douglas Jodoin, Brenda Jodoin, Joel Ruwet, James Last (son) and Michael Last, MD.

Mention sailing and his eyes brighten. He smiles and you can almost feel the cool breeze in the bay, water splashing across the bow and the familiar “come about,” directing you to move to the other side of the boat. A seagull squawks and you’re off, tacking your way across the water and into the morning sun. And then, you remember that you’re still in the good doctor’s office…

Michael Last, MD, is the Section Chief of General Surgery for Eisenhower Medical Center, and when he’s not operating, he likes to be on his sailboat. Born and raised in London, England, Dr. Last was known more for his antics than his stellar grades as a youth. Spirited and bright, he completed his undergraduate studies in two years and medical school in three. Following an internship in England, Dr. Last left for New York at the age of 25, completing his internship and residency at Long Island Jewish Hillside Medical Center, followed by a Fellowship in colorectal surgery at The Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Last returned to New York where he got the call to come to Eisenhower.

“I came to visit in January of 1984 on one of those jewel-like January days, and I was sold. New York was knee-deep in snow,” remembers Dr. Last. “I started to practice here that summer. The area’s been really good to me.”

Specializing in gastrointestinal surgery, Dr. Last is one of the most experienced laparoscopic minimally invasive colon surgeons in the valley. “Laparoscopic minimally invasive surgery is such a great technological advancement. It’s easier on the patients, and they heal much more quickly.”

Besides performing laparoscopic surgery, Dr. Last teaches others to perform this intricate procedure. The successful course at Eisenhower has been running for slightly more than a year.Dr. Last is grateful for the support he receives in all aspects of his work. “This really has been an excellent place to spend my professional career. When you consider the other 200-bed institutions in the entire state, or in fact, the nation, Eisenhower is far ahead of most of them,” says Dr. Last.“They’ve been extremely supportive of new techniques I’m interested in and willing to provide the technology or instrumentation. They help me to stay on the cutting edge.”

Prevention is key, particularly in the field of gastrointestinal illnesses. Dr. Last believes that staying fit is fairly basic: a good diet, exercise, drinking in moderation and not smoking. “I think a lot of illness is diet-related. Also, when I was a boy, people would walk or bike to work. There were very few two-car families. Now, everybody drives a car, even to go five blocks.”

Relieving stress is also an important part of staying healthy, and for that, Dr. Last goes sailing. He and his wife Ann travel to San Diego almost every weekend during the summer.With just one of their five children still at home, it’s easier to get away for those heady ocean jaunts. “And one day,” smiles Dr. Last, “We’ll go around the world.”

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