

Mark Benson, DO - The Family Man



Mark Benson, DO, with son Dennis and Shadow, the family's black lab.

Perhaps it's the fact that he's a family man that makes Mark Benson, DO, such a remarkable family practitioner. The father of two sons — Alan, 20, currently a student at Oxford, and Dennis, 16, a Junior at La Quinta High — Benson decided some time ago to pursue family practice over emergency medicine so that he could devote more time to his children. Residents of Palm Desert, the Bensons moved to the Desert in 1987 from Iowa (by way of Michigan), where Benson says, "...good grades typically meant an expectation to pursue a medical career."

Today, Benson shares a thriving family practice in Palm Desert with his wife, Aurora L. Benson, DO. Board Certified in Family Practice and Emergency Medicine, Benson also just completed a term as the Chair of Eisenhower Medical Center's Family Practice Department. During his most recent two-year term and an earlier term in 1993 as Family Practice Chair, Dr. Benson has seen many changes in the business of family medicine here in the desert.

"The demographics and the way medicine is changing have altered the way we do business," Benson explains, noting the increasing regulations, such as state laws regarding transfers of patients to other facilities, the emphasis by HMOs for more hospital-based care, and the added paperwork related to Medicare. "Today, family practitioners are not as tied to the hospital as they used to be; many of them use other hospital-based physicians to manage their hospital patients, thus keeping their practices in their practice."

Regardless of the changes, however, Benson says he loves what he does — "A day doesn't go by that I can't say 'I've helped someone today.'" He also has a lot of fond respect for the hospital he has been so closely associated with: "Eisenhower is an incredible community hospital. There's an emphasis on quality of care — they actually take action to correct problems that arise. There's a genuine feeling of a community at Eisenhower, a community that is committed to moving forward with excellence in patient care."

Earlier in his career, Benson received accolades following his involvement in helping to create the Disaster Preparedness Plan for the Coachella Valley. The plan outlines what should be done in the event of an earthquake and has received national recognition in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and as a model desert preparedness plan here in the United States and abroad. "I came to the desert from Michigan, and I began asking questions about what happens if there's an earthquake. Since I was the one that asked the question, I'm the one that ended up chairing the project. All of a sudden, I became a disaster guru."

When he's not working or developing disaster preparedness plans, Benson enjoys spending quality time with his family and dog, Shadow, a black lab. An avid in-line skater, Benson reportedly skates without the use of safety equipment. Does he recommend this? "No," he says with a chuckle. "There was a bit of a learning curve at which time I did wear safety equipment."

But, alas, a man who excels at most everything he pursues must be at least "lukewarm" at something.... "I'm a terrible golfer, but a patient once reassured me that if you want a good doctor, you should find a bad golfer."