

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

We chat with **DR. MAHLON KERR** of Synergy Plastic Surgery about his practice and carrying on his family's legacy. **BY MEGAN PORTORREAL**



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Cliche: How long have you been a plastic surgeon and what has been the most rewarding?

Dr. Mahlon Kerr: I started my plastic surgery residency in 2005 in Salt Lake City, which turned out to be a great place to learn about plastic surgery and gain the skill set that I now have. Utah has the highest per capita number of breast augmentations and abdominoplasties performed in the United States, which is something that it is not well known outside of the plastic surgery world. It was an excellent place to train, and I did thousands of cases during my residency. I moved to Texas five years ago, and we opened Synergy Plastic Surgery and have been here ever since. I think that Texas was a great choice for us. It was a natural fit for the practice, and I think the patients really feel how dedicated that both my staff and I are to them. I think the most rewarding thing about plastic surgery is changing people's lives for the better and giving them self-confidence that they didn't have before. For me personally, as a surgeon, the variety of different surgeries that perform from head to toe keeps me on my toes and interested.

While most of your services seem to address the needs of women, have you had any male clients this year and, if so, do they normally want to keep it a secret?

Male plastic surgery is definitely on the rise.

Most common procedures will be facial procedures like face lifts, brow lifts and eyelid surgery, but we also do a great number of body contouring, both from simple liposuction to surgery after massive weight loss procedures. I think that men don't necessarily want to keep it a secret. They are becoming more open with their surgeries, as are women. I think in general society has become very accepting of plastic surgery as something that a patient can choose to do for themselves and, unlike in the 1940s and 1950s when it was a hush-hush secret and you had to be completely recovered before you returned, nowadays people understand that plastic surgery is more commonplace, and it is absolutely not just the elite and wealthy of our society that are having procedures done.

Tell us more about your family's history in the medical industry.

I have a long history of medicine in my family. My father was a chiropractor and my mother was a nurse. My grandfather was president of the American Public Health Association. His father and two generations before him were all surgeons. I was inspired really by my parents who had a dedication to their patients, and my father who had a solo practice, like I do. I grew up in medicine. It was something that was always around. My uncle is also a dermatologist, so for me it seemed like a natural choice as a career. It's fun to think that I'm representing the family tree, especially gearing it back towards sur-

gery, as we have such a long line of surgeons stretching back to the Civil War.

What made you decide to become a plastic surgeon versus doing other types of surgery?

When I was a medical student, my first rotation was in anatomy. The chairman of plastic surgery taught the anatomy lab. I approached him early on the first couple of months of medical school because I knew I was interested in being a surgeon, but I didn't really know what kind. He really took me under his wing and really inspired me to continue in this area. My first operation I ever scrubbed was an abdominoplasty, and it really went on from there. I scrubbed hundreds of plastic surgery cases before I even started my clinical electives as a medical student. I think that his mentorship really guided me towards plastic surgery. Plus, I really enjoy the variety of surgeries you get to perform as a plastic surgeon and really enjoy the experience the patients have when we change their lives for the better.

What was the most challenging part of studying all those years and how did you overcome that challenge?

Plastic surgery training takes literally forever. After high school, I did four years of college, four years of medical school and then six years of residency. The hardest times were certainly the early years in residency and internship, but at the same time there is a real

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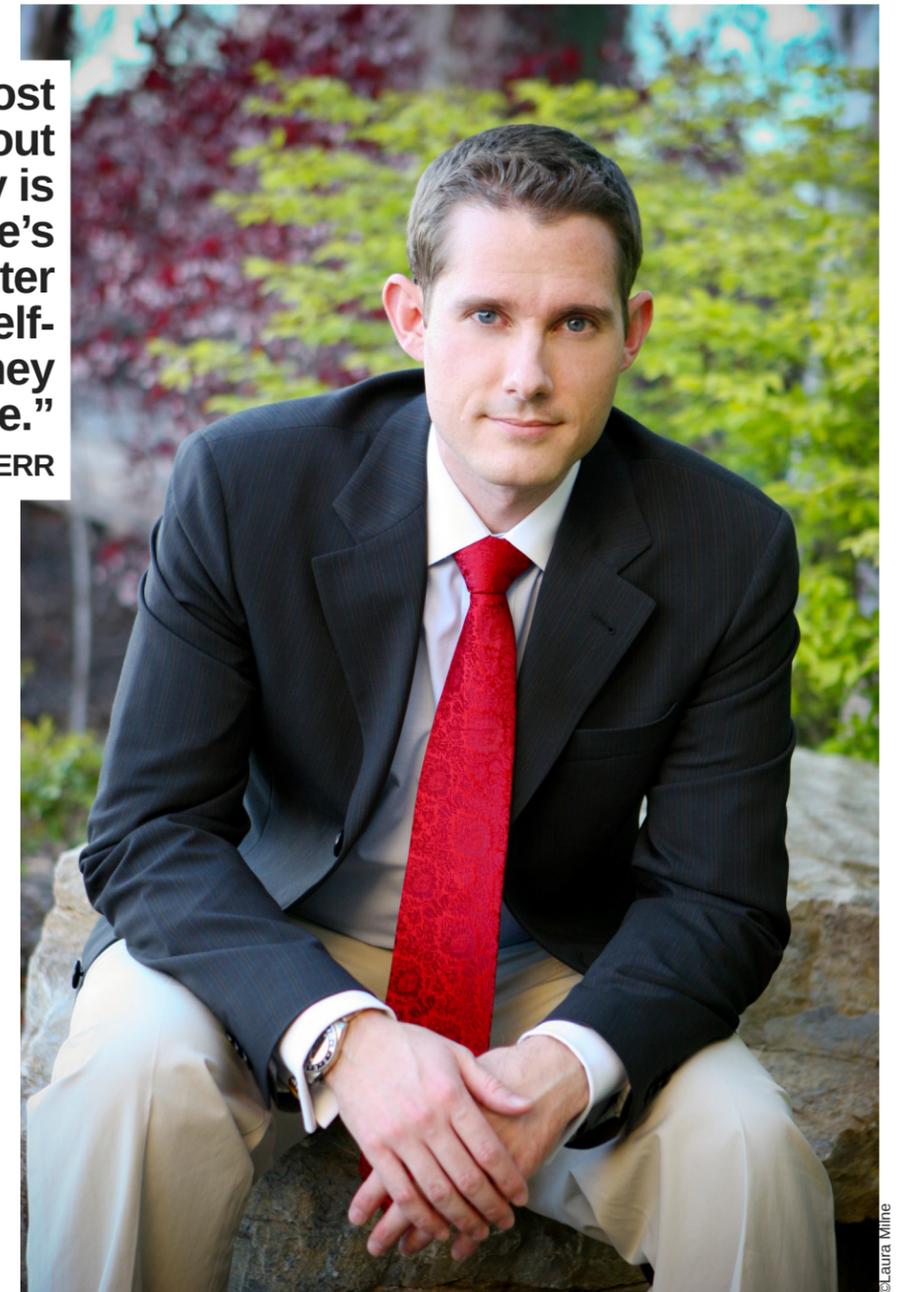
significant camaraderie you have with other residents. Plastic surgery residents are few and far between, so sometimes it is a bit lonely, but overall I found that I was doing what I loved, so no matter how hard it was or how little sleep I got, it made it easy to keep going.

What do you most credit for your success?

The thing I can credit the most is really the ability to relate to people. Surgeons specifically, but doctors in general, sometimes do not have the best bedside manner. For myself, I came from a medical family, but I was raised on a ranch, and I really understand how to interact with people in general. I am a friendly person who is very outgoing in my personal life, and I think that being personable really transcends into my work life. People can really get a sense of honesty and directness when I'm speaking with them. Then you combine that with an excellent staff that uses the same approach and really provides a level of service, which few other practices are able to do.

What is the recovery time for someone who has just received, say, a tummy tuck?

The tummy tuck is a harder operation to recover from. The average patient needs about 10-14 days off work. Most people do not drive for about 10 days. But, more so than really any other operation I do, a tummy tuck will change dramatically how you feel about yourself, how you interact with other people, how your clothes fit. I really think a tummy tuck should be considered a reconstructive procedure. Even though it is not covered by



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insurance, it is really an operation that few people need unless they have lost a massive amount of weight or had a pregnancy. So I think that for a patient approaching a tummy tuck, you should really think of, "Hey, I'm just trying to put myself back together" rather than "I'm trying to change myself into something I'm not."

What surgeries are done in your office or somewhere else?

We are building an AAAASF (American Association For Accreditation Of Ambulatory

Surgery Facilities, Inc.) certified operating room and should be done with this hopefully in the next few weeks. We will move all of our cosmetic surgeries into this location, which will be adjacent to our new offices, as well. To have the same team for every operation is really going to change our patient experience, and we are very excited about opening this new facility.