WESLEY CHoy
Is one of the pioneers
when it comes to orthopedics in the Kankakee area

Dr. Choy has been practicing at OAK Orthopedics since 1983. He was recruited to the practice 35 years ago by Dr. Milton Smit. Smit and Choy knew each other because both had been orthopedic surgery residents at Northwestern University. When Dr. Choy arrived, he joined a practice that was Smit, Dr. Morris Lang and himself.

Dr. Choy liked the work, loved the practice he had joined and appreciated the community.

“What I like about orthopedics here,” he says, “is the patient contact. We have a better doctor-patient relationship because the community is smaller and more close knit. Here, when I am waiting in line at the store, people will come up and say, ‘Hey, doc, remember me?’”

You do not get that in a big city, Dr. Choy says.

Then again, because Dr. Choy has been here so long he has seen a lot and done a lot. In the early years, with a much smaller group everyone did everything. Now there is more specialization.

He describes the practice now as more gratifying because you do not have to go at “150 miles an hour.”

Dr. Choy recounts two memories from the early years. The practice was located in offices at Riverside and there were a lot more farming accidents. There are fewer now, possibly because of a greater emphasis on farm safety.

He is originally from Topeka, Ks. His father was from Hawaii and his mother was from Tucson, Az. Their parents, his grandparents, were from China. Dr. Choy’s family includes a sister who lives in Chicago.

He originally went to Purdue University for engineering, then transferred to Kansas State University where he majored in mechanical engineering, but hedged his bets by taking all the prerequisites for medical school. That wasn’t a bad idea, he says. Both of his parents had health-oriented careers.

His father was a urologist, the first board-certified urologist in Kansas. His mother was a dietitian.

Still, as a budding engineer at Kansas State, he had to complete a senior project as part of a team of students. Their plan was the design of a burner system, consuming unneeded methane, for offshore drilling platforms. The group had to make a presentation at the headquarters of Phillips 66 in Bartlesville, Ok. The Phillips people were sufficiently impressed that they offered the team jobs.

So Choy was faced with a decision — medicine or engineering? He went on to medicine. In part, orthopedics appealed to him because it had a mechanical base. It’s putting things together — making the joint work.

“When you help people recover from injuries and return to their original function, that’s satisfying for the patient and for yourself,” he says.

Choy went on to medical school at Loyola in Chicago then onto orthopedic surgery residency and a fellowship in hand surgery at Northwestern University.

He first practiced in Houston, Texas, but the culture did not suit him. When Dr. Smit gave him the opportunity to return to the Midwest, he had decided he really liked the Chicago and Kankakee County area. Smit had been four years ahead of Choy at Northwestern.

Kankakee County’s lack of traffic was a plus, as was the location of both hospitals here, where he said were interested in “helping you and serving you.”

When Dr. Choy first arrived, he did everything. He still does a lot. He works on shoulders and knees. He repairs cartilage and rotator cuffs. Some problems occur because people fall or get injured. In other occurrences, the joint just wears out. He removes bone spurs. He resutures the rotator cuff to the bone.

With knees, the idea is to preserve what you can when it comes to the substances — the cartilage and meniscus — between the bones. Sometimes a repair works after a tear. Keeping the cushion helps prevent arthritis.

When the anterior cruciate ligament tears in the knee, that can be reconstructed. Sometimes using tendons from elsewhere in the patient’s body and sometimes using donor tissue from a cadaver.

“We are a lot more advanced and specialized in orthopedics than we were years ago,” Dr. Choy says. Procedures have improved. Materials are stronger. Minimally invasive techniques allow the body to heal faster. There is more understanding how muscles heal.

At OAK, Dr. Choy says, the equipment is first rate, certainly comparable to what you would find in much larger cities. The OAK staff is eager and helpful.

“It is a gratifying situation,” he says. “Here you can appreciate what you do.”

When not working, Dr. Choy relaxes by playing tennis and fishing. He has a boat and takes it out on Illinois lakes and occasionally on Lake Michigan. He’s also comfortable in the kitchen and as a cook, making desserts and pastries. That’s the influence of his mother, he says.

He “does it all” in the kitchen. He also does it all at OAK, as he has for years.