



Phil Whitacre has his gait analyzed under the direction of IML biomedical engineer Dr. Akiko Mori (above); at top is how the gait analysis looks when it is computer animated.

WALK THIS WAY

Step into the future of joint-replacement surgery with Dr. W. Andrew Hodge and his **Institute for Mobility and Longevity**.

By STEVE DORFMAN, Special to Healthy Living

The discomfort in his neck and hip wasn't too bad at first. Certainly nothing unbearable. Arthritis, his doctor said. But as the years passed, the hip pain persisted and then increased — as did his intake of painkillers.

A decade ago, a friend who'd had great results with hip-replacement surgery insisted he see the surgeon who had given him (the friend) a new lease on life. And that's how retired Rear Admiral Phil Whitacre came under the care of one of the world's leading joint-replacement surgeons, and the founder/medical director of the Institute for Mobility and Longevity, Dr. W. Andrew Hodge.

Knees, hips, shoulders...doctors have been replacing the worn-out or damaged joints of senior citizens for more than a century. But Dr. Hodge, a Jupiter orthopaedic surgeon who's been performing these types of procedures for three decades, has been at the forefront of a radical transformation in the industry.

"When I started, there wasn't much thought given to how long a replacement joint would have to last," Hodge explained. "Patients were usually elderly and sedentary, and the likelihood was that they would die long before the artificial joint gave out. Now, that's no longer the case."

Hodge said that the number of knee replacements done in the United States is expected to double in the next decade (from 500,000 to more than a million by 2020), and that the demographics of joint-replacement recipients has been trending younger for the

last 20 years. "We're now seeing patients in their 50s and 40s — and some even in their 30s," Hodge said. And, the younger these baby boomer and Gen-X patients are, Hodge continued, the more likely they are to be — and insist on remaining — active.

Good thing, then, for all of his past, current and future patients (not to mention, joint-replacement recipients the world over) that he's made research into the field one of his life's missions. The state-of-the-art Institute for Mobility and Longevity (IML), a research facility that he founded in 1992 (and which is now headquartered at Jupiter Medical Center), is testament to that.

An avid surfer, sailor, tennis player and traveler, Whitacre, 76, had been active his whole life. But when his problematic right hip began restricting his lifestyle, he let Dr. Hodge replace it in 1999. "Within a couple of weeks, I was completely pain-free and back to doing everything I wanted to do," recalled Whitacre who, for the last 18 years, has headed the Palm Beach chapter of the United Way and currently sits on the board of seven local non-profit organizations.

Whitacre fared just fine with his new hip, but he wasn't done with Dr. Hodge — not by a long shot...

PROFESSIONAL DETOUR

Raised in the tiny town of Paris, Ill. (population: 9,000), where his family has owned Hodge's Hardware since 1851, Hodge, 58, might've seemed an unlikely candidate to become a world-renowned orthopaedic surgeon and



Dr. W. Andrew Hodge (center) with two of knee-replacement patients — former U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig (left) and Hall of Fame baseball player Gary Carter.

medical researcher. After all, he didn't even study pre-med.

"Growing up around the hardware store, I was always comfortable with tools — and had a fascination with how things worked. I wanted to be an engineer," Hodge said.

However, upon graduating from the University of Illinois with a degree in aeronautical and astronautical engineering, Hodge's academic advisor pointed out that the aerospace industry was contracting and perhaps he should consider a different professional path. "Hello, medical school," Hodge recalled with a laugh.

He'd eventually end up in Boston with a dual fellowship at Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology while on staff at Massachusetts General Hospital. It was during this period that he began combining medicine and