Mitchell Whitehead learned he will practice family medicine at TMH. The Florida State Medical School held its National Resident Matching Program (NRMP), or Match Day on Friday in the Ruby Diamond Auditorium where students were told where they will do their residency work.

Mitchell Whitehead knew he wanted to be a family doctor after he shadowed Graceville physician Steve Davis while a high school senior in Cottondale.

“He was a small-town doc who knew everyone and everyone knew him,” Whitehead said. “I thought it would be really cool to have that kind of a bond with the community.”

Eight years later, Whitehead’s dream has all but come true. A member of Florida State University’s College of Medicine 2014 class, Whitehead learned Friday that he will start a three-year residency this summer at Tallahassee Memorial Family Medicine program, with the goal of returning to his native of Jackson County to continue his career.

Whitehead, 26, is the only member of FSU’s 10th graduating class to be assigned to the local family medicine residency, but six of his classmates learned during Friday’s festive “Match Day” ceremony that they will also be staying in town, members of the still growing internal medicine residency program at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare that is sponsored by FSU.

All but two of the medical school’s 115 fourth-year students successfully matched Friday, as graduating medical students across the country took part in similar ceremonies.

Placing new doctors in residency programs in Florida continues to be a vexing problem, however. Florida ranks No. 44 in the nation for residency slots, which explains why 68 of the 113 FSU students are going out of state to begin their medical careers.

This is critically important to Florida’s health care needs, because numerous studies have shown that physicians usually start their practice near the site of their residency.

“We’ve placed a great deal of emphasis on trying to create more graduate medical education opportunities in Florida and I think we’re starting to see the effects already,” John P. Fogarty, dean of the College of Medicine, said in a release. “We kept six more of our graduates in Florida with our new internal medicine program at TMH and overall the number of grads leaving the state is lower than it has been in the past several years. That’s a trend we’d like to see continue.”

FSU’s medical school, created in 2000 with the mission of producing more primary care doctors, particularly for rural and under-served areas in Florida, is sending 52 percent of its graduates to primary care residency programs, including obstetrics-gynecology. Internal medicine was the most popular match (24) with family medicine second (17). One student matched with FSU’s new family medicine program in Fort Myers. This is the first year that program has participated in the match.
Whitehead, the first member of his family to go to college, spent his first two years at Chipola College before finishing his undergraduate studies at FSU in 2010.

“I know I would like to stay in northwest Florida and be a family physician,” he said. “I haven’t found anything in family medicine that has turned me off.”