

Remembering Doc Peaden

In its first 10 years, it was known simply as “the auditorium” or “1400.” Everyone knew that if such a beautiful space was ever named for someone, that person would have to be special indeed. Then in June, Sen. Durell Peaden died — and suddenly it became obvious that this should have been the Durell Peaden Auditorium all along. He was one of the handful of people about whom you could say: “Without him, the College of Medicine probably wouldn’t exist.”

He had all the right ingredients at the perfect time: He was a physician, legislator and Florida Panhandle native; he cared about his rural neighbors; he constantly dreamed up big ideas; and he wouldn’t give up.

He dropped by FSU one day in late 1997 and asked whether the university could create a medical school to provide the primary-care doctors that rural Northwest Florida needed. The next month he was introduced to Myra Hurt, then-director of FSU’s Program in Medical Sciences, which was providing the first year of medical school for bright Panhandle students (and others) who previously wouldn’t have had a shot at an M.D. She and Peaden became allies and friends.

Several years and several miracles later, with critical assistance from then-President Sandy D’Alemberte at FSU and then-Speaker John Thrasher at the Florida House, the FSU College of Medicine was established. Over the years, Peaden contributed his time, money (for student scholarships) and considerable influence to help the college produce physicians for elder, rural, minority and other underserved populations.

This school, of course, was only one of countless worthwhile causes he supported in his 69 years. Equipped with both an M.D. and a J.D., he served in the Florida House from 1994 to 2000 and the Senate from 2000 to 2010. He started as a Democrat and switched to the Republican Party. In a story for the News Service of Florida upon Peaden’s death, Jim Saunders wrote: “With his soft, slow drawl, Peaden liked to describe himself as a ‘country doctor.’ He was a well-liked figure in the Legislature,” where he was widely known as Doc. He was survived by his wife, Nancy, and three children. And now a lovely auditorium bears his name.

“He had such a life force,” said Hurt, senior associate dean. “I never saw him down, not one time. He was always up to something, always had some project, some plan. He was something else.”

Read the Durell Peaden obituary on our website



RAY STANYARD

Durell Peaden Jr., left, appeared with current FSU President John Thrasher at the College of Medicine’s first commencement ceremony in May 2005. It was a crowning achievement for him and Thrasher, who had been instrumental in creating a new medical school at Florida State.

Producing family docs

The continuum of care that family physicians provide exists nowhere else, says the Florida Academy of Family Physicians. And just about everyone agrees our country needs more of them.

So there were lots of smiles at the College of Medicine this year when it was announced that the school, once again, was among the country’s top 10 producers of “family docs,” as they call themselves.

“This reflects a commitment by the entire school to meet the legislative mandate that created our school with a focus on primary care and our mission of meeting the needs of communities, especially the underserved populations, across the state,” said Daniel Van Durme, a family physician and chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health. “From outreach programs in rural areas that begin before college, through admissions policies that focus on characteristics likely to produce family doctors, through our innovative curriculum.”

Second-year student Tatianna Pizzutto is sold on family medicine.

“I want to have the breadth of knowledge and ability to treat anyone anywhere,” said Pizzutto, president of the medical school’s Family Medicine Interest Group. “My passion is for the patient. And from what I’ve seen in my year-plus here, every patient *needs* a primary practitioner to orchestrate their care and navigate our health-care system.”

Based on a three-year average reflecting the 2012, 2013 and 2014 classes, the College of Medicine ranks seventh on the latest list released by the American Academy of Family Physicians. It was also in the top 10 in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

“We have great graduates matching at wonderful programs throughout the country and a true commitment to primary care and patient-centered, community-based care,” said Dean John P. Fogarty, himself a family doc. “Recognition as one of the top 10 schools for producing family physicians is a great affirmation that our focus is working.”