

Local medical student among FSU's first graduating class

Ajay Mhatre plans to return to Lake City and practice medicine.

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TALLAHASSEE — Today will be a milestone in Florida State University history, and one Lake City man will be a part of it.

Ajay U. Mhatre will graduate today as part of the College of Medicine's very first class.

The new doctor plans to return to Lake City to practice.

Mhatre graduated from the University of Florida in May of 2001 with highest honors in microbiology and cell science.

He also earned a minor in chemistry and performed research at the Gainesville VA hospital's cardiology department.

Mhatre drew inspiration

from his father, Dr. Umesh Mhatre, a psychiatrist in Lake City.

Despite strenuous course work, Mhatre managed to donate his time and talents to the community.

Among these, he helped physically and mentally handicapped people, troubled children and battered women.

He was awarded the Charles J. Fite Volunteer of the year award in Columbia county for his services.

In his free time, Mhatre scuba dives, holds a black belt in Tang Soo Do, and is working toward obtaining a private pilot's license.

He said he recently started taking up golf.

The graduation comes after five years of legislation to create and accredit the Florida State University College of Medicine.

The commencement ceremony will be held today at 10 a.m. at the College of

Medicine Courtyard in Tallahassee.

Mhatre and his classmates started their program in May 2001 in Tallahassee.

They studied there for their first two years of medical school, and completed their third and fourth years at the medical school's regional campuses in Orlando, Pensacola and Tallahassee.

Mhatre studied at the Pensacola campus.

The students have all passed the national licensing exam (USMLE Step 2) and have been matched with residency programs, where they will begin their graduate medical education in July.

Mhatre will be completing his residency at Shands at the University of Florida working in internal medicine.

The FSU College of Medicine is the first new M.D.

FSU

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COURTESY PHOTO

Ajay U. Mhatre (far right), graduate of Florida State University's College of Medicine, treats patient Lakisha Smith while Dr. George Smith of Escambia County looks on. Mhatre will be graduating today as part of the medical school's inaugural graduating class. He plans to return to Lake City to practice.

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program to be established in the United States since 1982.

"I definitely plan on returning to Lake City to practice," Mhatre said. "I grew up in this area and feel like I can make a big difference."

For right now, he will be working in internal medicine but he has interests in cardiovascular medicine.

"Medical school was a unique experience," Mhatre said. "In my program, we were exposed to patients within our first six weeks."

In most traditional medical schools, students don't have major patient contact until their last two years.

He said he benefited from a small class size of less than 30 students.

"The main challenge was staying focused on the goal and always remembering that this is for the betterment of helping people," Mhatre said.

"Medicine is about people skills and showing compassion to people of all walks of life in some of the worst parts of their lives."

Following his residency, he will complete fellowship work.

Despite attending both UF and FSU, Mhatre knows exactly who he cheers for.

"I will always cheer for the Gators," he said.

In addition to graduation, he will also be getting married.

He and his fiancée will be having a traditional Indian wedding in Lake City during Memorial Day weekend and a Catholic wedding later in Panama City.

Mhatre's father, Dr. Umesh Mhatre, said he is very proud of his son.

"I never pushed Ajay toward

medicine, but he grew up tagging along with me and several family friends who were also in the medical practice," he said.

"Once he was at UF, I encouraged him, but never pushed him toward being a doctor."

Mhatre says he is happy that his son wishes to return to Lake City to practice.

"Some people I talk to seem like they can't wait to get out of Lake City, but Ajay always said he was going to come right back home to serve his community," he said. "We are both proud of our city."

When Ajay learned that he was accepted to FSU, he called his father saying he had a serious problem.

"I told him to call his mother because I was busy," Umesh Mhatre said. "But when he told me what the problem was, I agreed it was a serious problem. His sister called him a traitor and refused to speak to him for a month for choosing FSU."

Years later, Umesh Mhatre said he is pleased with the education his son received at FSU.

"That says a lot coming from a die-hard Gator," he said. "It is a fine school and he received good training there."

Dr. Paul McLeod, assistant dean of the FSU Regional Medical School campus in Pensacola, calls Ajay Mhatre one of the most quiet leaders in his class.

"When he speaks, even if not as often as others, what he says is always important and intuitive," McLeod said. "He impressed the faculty with his professionalism, calm demeanor and ability to communicate with patients no matter what their background."