

PRESS RELEASE

Rural Hometown Doctor Named Florida Family Physician of the Year

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By Nancy Kinnally TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The Florida Academy of Family Physicians has selected Florida State University College of Medicine faculty member Dr. C. David Smith as Florida's 2004 Family Physician of the Year.

Although he practices in a Panhandle town of fewer than 600 residents, Smith's impact is immeasurable to the people of Jay, Fla., and the surrounding area, where he has been the backbone of the health care system for 23 years.

"As the recipient of the Academy's most prestigious award, we are proud to recognize Dr. Smith's ability to combine clinical excellence and compassion in a way that makes him an exceptional role model for patients, co-workers and a generation of aspiring family doctors," said Fleur Sack, M.D., president of the Florida Academy of Family Physicians.

While he was once the only physician practicing in Jay, today the local medical community is thriving as a direct result of Smith's influence. Not only has he succeeded in recruiting at least a half dozen physicians to the area, but in his teaching role with the FSU College of Medicine's Regional Medical School Campus – Pensacola, he also is working to influence medical students to pursue careers in family medicine in rural areas.

"Dr. Smith demonstrated to me the extremely critical role family physicians play in a patient's life and lit a fire in my heart to pursue that very vision," said FSU medical student Joda Lynn, who did a family medicine rotation with Smith at his practice in Jay.

Smith serves patients from his community and the surrounding area in his private practice, the emergency room, acute care center, hospital and nursing home. He is also team physician for the local high school football team and even makes house calls. Co-workers point to Smith's ability to relate to patients of all ages, backgrounds and income levels.

"No one is treated differently in his eyes," said Debra Hayes, his nurse for the last 22 years. "We have patients who are uneducated and cannot read or write, and we have patients with six figure incomes and numerous college degrees. No one is different. He treats them all the same, regardless."

His patients offer the most effusive accolades. One local woman told the FAFP of how Smith helped her and her family through the death of her mother.

"The community is blessed to have this man among us," wrote Margaret Miller. "If we could have a statue in Jay of a hero, it would be Dr. David Smith, physician extraordinaire, humanitarian by gift of God, and our beloved rural doctor."

Smith completed his first year of medical school at FSU through the Program in Medical Sciences, a former feeder program for the University of Florida College of Medicine. He graduated from UF's medical school second in his class in 1979.

As a young doctor with seemingly limitless career potential, Smith made the difficult decision to cut short his residency training at the University of South Alabama in 1980 when administrators at his hometown Jay Hospital told him the hospital – like many rural hospitals at the time – faced closure due to financial difficulties and a lack of physician manpower. He is credited with enabling the hospital to stay open by setting up his Jay practice at that critical time.

In 1998 the Baptist Health Care Foundation awarded Smith the Hollinger Award for commitment to community, service, dedication and excellence, and in 2002 the faculty of FSU presented him with the Vires Torch Award for outstanding commitment to the fulfillment of FSU's academic missions.

As a student, Smith was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi and Alpha Omega Alpha honor societies, and in 1976 he received the Emanuel Suter Award as most outstanding graduate in the FSU Program in Medical Sciences. He also was named Best Teaching Intern at the University of South Alabama in 1980.

While he is widely considered a hometown hero, Smith is quick to share credit with his office staff, co-workers, patients and family.

"I just feel like I've been very fortunate to always have great people around me," Smith said. "I could not do what I do without the help of my staff, and the support from my wife and family, and really the entire local community."

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The Florida Academy of Family Physicians (FAFP) is the Florida chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians, the national association of family doctors. The FAFP is the only organization in Florida that solely represents the family physician. Its mission is to promote excellence in health care for Florida citizens, to advance and represent the specialty of family medicine, and to serve the unique needs of its members. The FAFP has nearly 4,000 members including practicing physicians, student residents and medical students with an interest in family medicine who are actively involved in continuing education, legislative advocacy, and support for this specialty. For more information visit www.fafp.org.