

Acceptance Speech from Dr. Joseph Mazziotta, 2024 Thomas L. Hicks, M.D. Outstanding Physician Award Recipient

Managing Editor's Note: These are Dr. Mazziotta's notes and not a formal write-up. Please excuse spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.

Thank you Don. When Shannon informed me that I was receiving this award and I would need someone to introduce me I immediately picked up the phone and called my mentor, Don Zorn. Don in his classic humble way said, "Joe, I'm retired, I thought I was out of the speech business." I replied, "you're alive. My first choice, Winston Churchill, is dead, so tag, you're it." I have actually become quite accustomed to the uncomfortable position of following a Zorn speech.

I am deeply honored and humbled to be considered for this award and to be able to share the podium with this year's I.B. Harrison, M.D. Humanitarian Award recipient, David Huang. This honor is not just a recognition of my individual efforts, but a testament to the collective support and guidance I have received throughout my journey in the medical field.

When I first arrived in Tallahassee, I was immediately struck by the sense of physician camaraderie and the strong connection with the community. Unlike my previous experience training at USF in Tampa, I found a profound bond between the physicians and the people in the surrounding community that extended beyond medicine. Because of this, I knew that this is the community I wanted to be a part of.

I am immensely grateful to the many mentors who have played a pivotal role in shaping my career. Dr. John Purvis, who believed in me and offered me a faculty position at TMHFMR right out of the Air Force; Don Zorn, who honed my leadership skills; and many others like Lisa Jernigan, Dean Watson, Alma Littles, and the late great Dr. AD Brickler. Each of these individuals has left an indelible mark on my journey, and I am forever indebted to their guidance.

My gratitude extends to the colleagues who have walked alongside me through the decades, challenging me to strive for excellence. Ed Forster, Phil Treadwell and many more of my faculty colleagues have been pillars of support and inspiration. It is a privilege to see them emerge as leaders in their own right.

In every workplace, there are family-like bonds that form. In a polygamous sounding way, I am fortunate to have many work "wives" like Holly and Linda at the wound center, and my nurse...I mean Sgt at Arms at FMR of 17 years, Tsige Tadesse, who keeps me grounded and our patients happy and healthy.

To the residents who have been under my mentorship, you are not just trainees to me, but like my own children. Your challenges, your growth, and your achievements have been the source of many of these grey hairs, countless sleepless nights, and a profound sense of pride and joy. Just as children teach us valuable lessons, you have pushed me to be a better physician and a better person.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I must acknowledge the true backbone of my success — my real family. From my parents who instilled in me a sense of wonder and endless possibilities, to my brother and sisters who have always stood by my side, and to my wife of 29 years Danielle, my partner in life and in every endeavor. Together, we have weathered challenges, celebrated milestones, and raised 3 incredible children: Jake (a lieutenant in the Army Combat Eng), Mackenzie, who will soon be entering her first year in UF School of Veterinary Med, and Ellie who is working her way through high school and discovering her own passions from track and field to theatre and music.

As I accept this award, I do so with a heart full of gratitude. Thank you to Shannon, Tom and the Capital Medical Society, Tallahassee Memorial, and the Tallahassee community for affording me the opportunity to do what I love in the community that I love.