

Dr. Don Zorn's Introduction of Dr. Joseph Mazziotta, Recipient of the 2024 Thomas L. Hicks, M.D. Outstanding Physician Award

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

Congratulations, good neighbor Dr. Huang. Very thankful for you, David.

Concerning Joe Mazziotta, 1: he can't be still, and 2: he's going to get himself into messes.

The fifth of 5 children, Joe was raised in New Jersey, in Nutley, a town famous for Annie Oakley, Martha Stewart, and Frankie Valli, and also famous as the place where most of the world's Valium was made. Joe's parents likely needed it.

Joe's mother was a switchboard operator. His dad, a master carpenter until disabling heart disease made it necessary they move to Florida, eventually to Cape Coral.

Prone to getting into messes, likely from not being able to keep still, Joe somehow was able to finish high school, and get sheepskins from the University of South Florida, and the USF School of Medicine.

He completed TMH's family practice residency in 1995, where, unable to be still at all, he was made chief resident. Then followed 4 years as a Physician in the US Air Force, stationed at MacDill AFB in Tampa.

Having recognized his inability to keep still, and his affinity for messes, we felt it best that Mazz return to Tallahassee, where attempts could be made to channel these behaviors, and that he did, in 1999.

For the past 25 years he has been on the residency faculty, rising to Associate Program Director. For the past 9 years, he's served as Program Director.

With national certifications in HIV, hyperbaric medicine, and chronic wound care, and with a strong interest in disaster management, he has spoken to this body, and various state and national assemblies. He has authored our discipline's national curriculum for disaster planning. And that's just the bare bones. Most people might just be busy enough with all that. But no, not Dr. Maserati. He just can't be still.

We first noted this when he was a resident. For one, he had a briefcase. He quickly brushed aside my suggestion to use the venerable overhead projector. He was modern. He had developed his own slides, carousels of them, and he insisted we meet after hours so that, after cheap crackers and cheese, and even cheaper wine, he could regale us with things he was interested in. Such as parasites, every parasite ever known to afflict man or beast, complete with life cycles and horrible graphic images of

what these parasites could do to human victims. At this point, our churning stomachs deeply regretted the cheap cheese and crackers, and the even cheaper wine.

He couldn't be still. While a resident, he did credible research, and went to Belize, a medical mission. He earned the national Resident Teacher Award.

The Air Force quickly found out. He couldn't be still. Could have just stayed at MacDill. Base physician. Not a bad gig. But Joe pestered them. They relented. He was sent to Jordan, where jointly with Jordanian Air Force physicians he visited the remotest areas of that country, providing medical care. There in southern Jordan, he walked the sands of the Wadi Rum Desert, where Sir TE Lawrence rallied the Bedouins against the Ottoman Empire in 1915. The man we know as Lawrence of Arabia.

Back home at MacDill AFB, Joe couldn't be still. The Air Force sent urgently to Nutley, NJ, for more Valium. And deployed him again, this time to Egypt, as part of Operation Bright Star. There he was assistant Chief of Emergency Services working with the modular Air Transportable Hospital.

While not deployed, he taught PA students at MacDill, likely in how not to keep still, twice earning Teacher of the Year honors.

Back at the residency, in our faculty meetings he would not be still, especially if sitting next to Forster and Treadwell. I kept thinking, "Why won't he just take a nap, like Dr. Brickler and all the rest?"

Allergic to spare time, he filled it with a 4-year tour of duty on the medical executive committee at TMH, in the officer track, culminating in a year as Chair.

His half day per week free he devoted to the Wound Healing Center at TMH, as one of the founding physicians. 19 years later, he's still doing it.

It wouldn't be a weekend without Mazz pulling shifts in the Cairo ER and the Perry ER. His call weekends with residents are legendary for his showing up at TMH at 4 AM, seeing all the patients before he meets with those he supervises. Bless his heart, he just cannot be still.

Softball, paintball, skit writing. Joe's there, rallying his own Bedouins. Just ask Danielle and the kids. He runs. Tough Mudders, even. They all run. The whole family.

And it's in his blood. He has to build: a long walkway out into the lovely swampy wilderness in back of their house, an amazing cabin on Island 23 in Lake Iamonia, the most elaborate and entertaining Halloween haunted trail ever known in these parts. Those same hands he has applied, with surpassing skill, to repair his patients.

Point #2: He's going to get himself into messes. Such as hurricanes and pandemics.

Whether assisting TMH with operations during storms, or driving west into the devastation of Katrina and Rita, delivering supplies and aid, Joe is right there not keeping still.

HIV, pandemic flu, COVID-19. He has studied how to prepare for these, has instructed others in how to do so, but also, has been eager to get his hands in there, in the dirtiness, danger, and confusion of the front line.

Saturday nights on an island in the ED at Doctor's Memorial in Perry, or facing the utter defenselessness of those with advanced HIV, Joe wanted in there.

Rounding on hospital patients in July with residents at every level the greenest they can be? That's a mess.

Directing a residency program? That surreal carousel with its unrelenting turning and returning, where the animals you ride are untethered, jumping on and off at random? A mess, surely.

Dirty wounds in extremities with arterial insufficiency?

The heart-wrenching poor of Nicaragua?

Messes all.

Situations most folks avoid.

"Let me in those messes," Joe says. Bless his heart. He can't help it.

Just as an aside: Pardon me, Joe. I know that you are proud of your laugh. But as explosive and loud as it most certainly is, when it comes to the internationally recognized standard, the famous Forsthoefel scale, it is a mere blip.

So let me add one more thing. Sorry, Shannon. The big thing. Joe has the heart of a great physician, one we can all be proud of.

You can *hear* of it in the testimonies of his patients, both those simple souls with the slightest of means, as well as the well-heeled leaders of our community.

You can *see* it in the way he had dealt with the many residents he's trained, who have treasured his example.

You can *feel* it in the care he takes of his HIV patients, in his service to the desperately poor of Nicaragua, in the many access ramps he has built in his spare time for the disabled in our community.

You can see it in his faith, which he lives, and in the beautiful lives of his wife Danielle, and children Jake, McKenzie, and Ellie.

When someone has a heart like that, you don't want him to hold still. And you do want him to jump into the messes.

Joe, let me say, as spokesperson for those assembled here, we have been proud to witness your growth as a physician and human being, and are deeply thankful for all you have meant for our community.

In warm remembrance of our dear departed Dr. Thomas Hicks, ladies and gentlemen, I proudly introduce your 2024 Outstanding Physician, Joe Mazziotta.