

## Thomas Jenkins Bixler II (1947-2024)



Dr. Thomas Jenkins Bixler II, 77, of Tallahassee, Florida, passed away on Sunday, October 20, 2024, surrounded by family. Dr. Bixler was a renowned cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon who had an enduring impact on the medical field and on the North Florida and South Georgia communities. His life's greatest work was helping others. His legacy will live on in those whose lives he saved and whose families he impacted over his many years of service and dedication to those in need.

Dr. Bixler was born in Guntersville, Alabama, to Dr. Thomas Jenkins Bixler and Geraldine Rankin Bixler. The family moved to Live Oak, Florida, to be with his paternal grandparents while his father was a physician in active military service, and then to Tallahassee, where he spent the rest of his childhood. During this time, he has many fond memories of time spent in Live Oak and Dowling Park with his family. He attended Leon High School in Tallahassee for one year before being accepted at the Oxford College of Emory University when he was just 15 years old, ultimately finishing his degree at Emory University.

He then began his medical training at the Emory University School of Medicine, where he graduated *cum laude* with his Doctor of Medicine degree in 1974. Following graduation, he continued his medical training over the next seven years at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he completed his surgical internship, residency in surgery, and Halsted residency in cardiac surgery. Upon completion of his surgical training at Johns Hopkins, he accepted a faculty position at the University of Kansas, where he would eventually become Professor and Chairman of the Department of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery. While at KU, he developed the first cardiac transplant program in Kansas where he led the team that performed the first heart transplant in the state in 1984, completed multiple pediatric and adult heart transplants, and trained residents in open heart surgery. In 1985, he moved to Tallahassee, where he founded the heart transplant program and Heart Surgery Center at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare. He built the program at TMH into one of the most successful in North Florida and went on to found the cardiac surgery program at South Georgia Medical Center in Valdosta, Georgia, which became one of the most prominent in the state under his stewardship. He was passionate about progressing the medical field through research and education. He was an intelligent, deft, and caring surgeon. He was wise and brave and his guidance and lessons will continue to help his children, grandchildren, and all those who loved him.

In his time away from the hospital, Dr. Bixler loved the coast. He particularly loved boating and fishing with his family. He was a voracious reader and enjoyed military history. He loved music and enjoyed listening to country artists and also the Grateful Dead. He was an active member of the Tallahassee community throughout his professional and retired years and donated to have the Bixler Emergency Center at TMH named in honor of his late father.

Dr. Bixler is preceded in death by his father, Dr. Thomas Jenkins Bixler, and his mother, Geraldine Rankin Bixler. He is survived by four children and two granddaughters, his son Thomas Jenkins Bixler III, his daughter Cissy Bixler Proctor (Stewart), and their mother JoAnn Bixler, his daughter Katherine Bixler Oberlies (Michael), his son John Yates Bixler (Carson), and their mother Jill Bixler, and his two granddaughters, Baelynn Bixler and Mae Oberlies. He is also survived by his siblings, John Calhoun Bixler (Donna), Jane Bixler Conn (Randy), Geraldine Brown Bixler Robbins (Danny), and his nieces and nephews Julie Conn Christesen (Eric), Diana Bixler, and Luke Bixler (Cassie), and his grandnieces and nephews Noah, Eleanor, Aubree, Melody, and baby John.

A visitation will be held on Thursday, October 24 at 4:00pm with a Rosary to start at 5:30pm at Bevis Funeral Home, 200 John Knox Road, Tallahassee, Florida. The funeral service will be held on Friday, October 25 at 1:30pm at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, 653 Miccosukee Road, Tallahassee, Florida, to be followed by a private burial for family. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that remembrance be made in Dr. Bixler's name to the TMH Foundation to benefit the Bixler Emergency Center, 1331 East 6th Avenue, Tallahassee, Florida 32303, [www.tmh.org/donate](http://www.tmh.org/donate).