

## Hot Springs doctor shares prestigious honor

### Pellegrino one of "10 Outstanding Young Americans"

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It is often said that you can judge a man by the company he keeps. If that's true, take note of Dr. Richard Pellegrino. His company includes the likes of President Clinton, Gov. Jim Guy Tucker, Sheffield Nelson, Sidney Moncrief and Herren Hickingbotham.

In years past these Arkansans were named as one of the "Ten Outstanding Young Americans" by the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce. Last night, Pellegrino joined their ranks when he, along with nine others from across the United States, received the award at a national ceremony in Tulsa.

More than 500 people have received this honor since its inception in the '30s. Some of the first included Howard Hughes, Orson Welles and Nelson Rockefeller. Those selected do not have to be Jaycee members but must be American citizens between the ages of 21 and 39.

In addition to maintaining a private practice in Hot Springs where Pellegrino is on the staff

of St. Joseph's Regional Health Center and AMI National Park

Medical Center, the neurologist is medical director and founder of the Institute for Neurology and Neuroscience Research.

Through the institute, he works to bring experimental medical treatments and medicine to rural Arkansas in a 22 county area surrounding Hot Springs and Russellville.

After completing his residency, the 39 year old New York native and his wife, Rita, moved to Hot Springs in 1989. He began his private practice and founded the institute in 1992. The nonprofit organization serves the elderly and those in rural areas suffering from neurological disorders, including Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and stroke. By performing medical testing, patients' treatments are paid for by government agencies and pharmaceutical companies.

Medical testing is divided into categories or phases, Pellegrino explains.

"There's the pre-clinical phase when it's tested on animals, then phase one when it's performed on humans. Phase two is testing for the proper dosage and phase three is studying whether or not it works, and phase four is allowing people to

access the drugs on the market for free.

"And the purpose of the institute is to take this flow of free medicine and the people in rural Arkansas and put the two together."

Today, the institute has two employees (an executive director and an administrative assistant), a national advisory board and a local board. The institute works to educate the patients in surrounding counties on prevention and treatments, recruit physicians to participate in the program, and create patient assistance programs to help with needs such as transportation and placing daily phone calls to remind patients to take their medicine.

Those working in partnership with the institute include the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Area Agency on Aging of West Central Arkansas, the AAA of Southwest Arkansas, and more than 39 physicians who currently make up the voluntary physician service organization, the Society for Community Based Medical Research, created to assist the institute.

In the last two years, the institute has attracted 13 national medical studies to Arkansas, Pellegrino says. Three months ago, the institute began work in Russellville with

the support of St. Mary's hospital.

Pellegrino created the institute while continuing his own private practice, the Pellegrino Center for Clinical Neuroscience, Inc.

"Basically, I work two jobs," he says, but Pellegrino isn't compensated for his work as the institute's medical director.

His average day begins at 6 a.m. and ends about 9:30 p.m. In the morning, Pellegrino makes his rounds in St. Joseph's Hospital next to his office building, then sees patients in his office from midmorning until early evening. After 5 p.m., he's back at the hospital for first-time consultations. The neurologist who specializes in diseases of the brain and spinal cord, also performs research.

His community work includes serving as a committee chairman of the Alzheimer's Respite Program and as medical director of the American Parkinson's Disease Association Information and Referral Center for Arkansas.

He has enjoyed working with patients in his career but founding the institute has tested his skills.

"It's a great challenge for me make it work. It's

so multifaceted—from dealing with government agencies and pharmaceutical companies, telling them Arkansas is a good place to be ... and then explaining to the people here what you've done."

Interviewed Monday, before receiving his award from the Junior Chamber of Commerce, Pellegrino was looking forward to the trip to Tulsa for the four-day gathering, which included an alumni dinner, several private receptions, the awards ceremony and a dance.

"It makes me feel very good because it's always nice to have somebody think you're doing a good job. You might think you are but it's nice to have it recognized. This has given me a lot of encouragement. It's like a slap on the back and someone saying, 'Keep up the good work, we expect a lot from you'" Pellegrino says.

He hopes not to disappoint. His goals include expanding the institute to serve the entire state.

Pellegrino's medical education began with a bachelor of science degree in biology from Manhattan College in the Bronx, N.Y., then masters' degrees from Yale University in New Haven, Conn., and Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx, where he also received his Ph.D. and his medical degree. He did

post-graduate studies at medical centers at New York Medical College, Columbia University, Pennsylvania State University and Yale.

Born in the Bronx and raised in Yonkers, N.Y., Pellegrino jokes that he ended up in Arkansas because "it's the land of opportunity." He says he and his wife were drawn to the state because of its rural beauty "and every year (in New York) the cold bothered us a little bit more."

But he says he and his wife are happy living in Hot Springs with their 3 year old daughter, Rachel. His two brothers and his parents, Nina and Gus Pellegrino, also recently moved to Springs.

"It makes the holidays a lot easier," he says.

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