

Meet Our **Members**

Richard G. Pellegrino, MD, Ph.D.

If we start this month's profile by mentioning actors Joe Pesci, Frankie Avalon and Joe Mantegna, *Billboard* magazine and the HBO hit *"The Sopranos,"* you will likely question whether you're reading the right trade publication. How about if we throw in Mark Twain, John and Robert Kennedy and Henry Kissinger just for fun? The fact is Dr. Richard Pellegrino of Hot Springs, Ark., has an association with all of these.

It's hard to summarize Dr. Pellegrino's life experiences and accomplishments in a short profile. Academically, he attended Manhattan College on scholarship and received a full scholarship to Yale, where he earned a master's degree in cell biology. He was one of only four students accepted into the Medical Scientist Training Program at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, where he spent six years on a full scholarship completing a medical degree and a Ph.D. in neurosci-



Dan Grimaldi, left, who played identical twin mobsters, Patsy and Philly Parisi, on *"The Sopranos,"* and actress Donna Moore, right, gave Dr. Pellegrino's play, *"I Love You Not,"* a staged reading at *The Players Club* in New York.

ence. He completed a one-year neurology residency at Columbia University and, following that, he returned to Yale where he completed a post-doctoral year in pharmacology.

Today, he operates a private neurology clinic in Hot Springs, which he established in 1989. His goal was to construct a personal and business life that allowed him to practice medicine effectively and compassionately while maintaining a fulfilling family life. He also wanted to retain the freedom to "follow my nose" intellectually, something Dr. Pellegrino refers to as an old-school feature of academic life

that is rapidly disappearing. "I found that maintaining a broad range of interests in an independent, private practice setting was the best way to do this for me," he said.

While his practice was and is important to him, he has always had a passion for research. In 1992, he started Central Arkansas Research (CARE), a clinical research company that he still runs. He also started a non-profit organization, INNResearch, to help educate the public about the rights and responsibilities of research participants. In 1995, he won a Ten Outstanding Young Americans Award (TOYA) for his work with INNResearch. Dr. Pellegrino said, "Standing on the stage with so many talented and giving people humbled me, and I was struck by the list of previous honorees." Winning the TOYA award put Dr. Pellegrino in the company of people like John and Robert Kennedy, Henry Kissinger and President Bill Clinton.

Dr. Pellegrino's life would be impressive enough if all we did was focus on his academic and professional accomplishments. However, his other passions warrant mention as well. For example, he wrote a play that was performed at *The Players Club* in New York, a club whose members included Edwin Booth (brother of John Wilkes) and Mark Twain. The male lead in Dr. Pellegrino's play was performed by Dan Grimaldi who played Patsty Parisi on *"The Sopranos."*

Dr. Pellegrino also wrote and produced a documentary film entitled *"Taking Back the Future."* The film, which premiered at the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival, focused on the subject of Multiple Sclerosis and followed the lives of eight

patients. At the end of the film, celebrities including Joe Pesci, Frankie Valli, Frankie Avalon, Ed Marinaro, Joe Mantegna and Helen Gurly Brown read moving letters from MS patients.

Dr. Pellegrino has also written newspaper columns, had an article on music and the brain published in *Billboard* magazine, and has written several books, including a medical thriller entitled *"Point Source."* The novel features characters with MS and is designed to help patients give their loved ones a better glimpse of what life is like for people with MS while also giving them a "good read."

Dr. Pellegrino credits his wife, Rita, with pulling him away from what he calls "the madness of wall-to-wall medicine" and for showing him the importance of family life – something he says too many physicians don't figure out until it is too late. No doubt the accomplishments he has achieved outside of medicine are at least partly attributable to this balance. Of

his wife he says, "We grew up together, through all the changes of medical school and academic life, and I love her."

Dr. Pellegrino and his wife, Rita, have two children, Rachael (16) and Richard (12).

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