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IRHA Recognizes Rural Physicians during Doc Hollywood Day Event in Springfield

Fourteen rural physicians have been honored by several Illinois groups during an awards ceremony held in Springfield. The *Rural Physician of Excellence Award* was presented to the physicians who were nominated by their communities for going above and beyond the call of duty to provide health care to rural and underserved residents throughout the State of Illinois.

During the celebration, Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn, chairman of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, officially proclaimed October 10 as "Doc Hollywood Day" in Illinois. "These are exemplary physicians working in Illinois that go beyond the call of duty to care for rural residents and help build our rural communities," said Quinn. "I salute these unsung heroes for going above and beyond to bring decent health care to underserved areas of Illinois."

Doc Hollywood Day was created in 2005 by the National Rural Health Association to honor our rural physicians and raise awareness of the need for additional rural health care providers.

Award winners were nominated by local community leaders who wanted to demonstrate their appreciation for the contributions made by their hometown physician.

"Like Dr. Hogue and his protégé Dr. Ben Stone in the 1980s movie *'Doc Hollywood,'* Illinois rural physicians work diligently to serve our residents and help community leaders build a foundation for health care in our rural regions," said Pat Bickoff, president, Illinois Rural Health Association.

The recipients of the 2006 Awards are: Dr. Rodney Alford of Kankakee; Dr. Hugo Avalos of Morris; Dr. John R. Beck Sr. of Chester; Dr. Edwin J. Carey of Sandwich; Dr. Don F. Hatten of Olney; Dr. Danca Luchici of Kewanee; Dr. Therese Sieradzki of Rochelle; Dr. Stonewall McCuiston of Kankakee; Dr. Sajjan Nemani of Centralia; Dr. Dennis Palmer of Aledo; Dr. Lawrence J. Rossi Sr. of Hopedale (deceased); Dr. Secundino E. Rubio of Salem; Dr. Thomas Staton of Metropolis, and Dr. Shokry Tawfik of Lena.

"SIU School of Medicine is pleased to again help honor these wonderful physicians, including many of whom are long-time practitioners, who do so much to serve rural areas of the state," said Dr. J. Kevin Dorsey, dean and provost of the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. "These honorees, including one of our own alums - Dr. Tom Staton from the class of 1990 - are a source of inspiration for SIU graduates and all others who are the next generation of physicians."

Sponsors of the event included the Illinois Rural Health Association, Illinois Hospital Association, SIU School of Medicine's Rural Health Initiative, OSF Medical Group, Illinois State Medical Society, and the National Center for Rural Health Professions.

[**Note to media** -- Information about the winners follows. More details about their nominations can be found at www.ilruralhealth.org.]

Dr. Rodney Alford, medicine and pediatrics physician in Kankakee -- "Dr. Alford strongly believes in giving of his time, talent and skills to help his fellow man – his church, his family, and the community. He was the major reason for a clinic being constructed in the Pembroke area. It is one of the poorest communities in the nation, but Dr. Alford fought hard to have one of the local hospitals build a clinic in the area so residents would have a medical facility. He is the kind of person that comes around once in a lifetime."

Dr. Hugo Avalos, retired physician in Morris -- "Dr. Avalos devoted his entire career to serving the people of Grundy County. His contributions to the community are wide ranging; from being an physician on the sidelines for all of our high school football games for more than 30 years without pay, to just being a pleasant and friendly face on the streets of Morris. This man is and has been a true treasure for not only the citizens of Morris, but all of the people in our entire area."

Dr. John R. Beck Sr., a family medicine physician in Chester -- "Dr. Beck served this community since 1964 and makes monthly visits to local nursing homes to attend to his patients. Also, he is active in church activities, Knights of Columbus, Chamber of Commerce, and is on the board of directors for one of the local banks. He is a compassionate and kind individual who is willing to help many and all regardless of race or creed."

Dr. Edwin Carey, a retired physician in Sandwich - "Dr. Carey has been in medical practice in rural Illinois in Sandwich, where he has provided both family medicine and surgery services for 48 plus years. Dr. Carey in many ways has been an integral part of the community he has served. He is both a caring and compassionate physician who cares and feels deeply for every patient he treats. It was a common practice for Dr. Carey to instruct a very ill patient to come to the back door of the clinic and he would see them immediately so that their discomfort would be minimized."

Dr. Don Hatten, an obstetrics and gynecology physician in Olney - "Dr. Hatten has spent the majority of his professional career at Richland Memorial Hospital, a 135-bed general acute care facility located in rural southeastern Illinois. As an OB/GYN, he has brought over 8,000 new lives into the world. This has, in some instances, resulted in multi-generational care for a number of area families. He has enjoyed the respect of his patients, professional colleagues and the nursing staff."

He is known for going out of his way to provide additional education/training to new members of the staff, and equally well-known for his devotion to his family."

Dr. Danca Luchici, an internal medicine physician in Kewanee - "Dr. Luchici opened her practice in Kewanee 15 years ago. In addition to being a strong patient advocate, she plays an active role on the medical staff at the local hospital. She not only gives each patient all the time needed for a successful office visit, she also makes house calls. Several years ago, she and a colleague worked tirelessly to solicit donations of medications and medical supplies to send to war-torn Bosnia."

Dr. Therese Lucietto-Sieradzki, a family medicine physician in Rochelle - "Dr. Lucietto-Sieradzki is a remarkable, dedicated young physician doing great things to provide needed health care services to the underserved rural population of northwest Illinois. I would use the word excellent to describe every aspect of this fine physician and person. When she opened her solo practice in April 2005, she opened the door to better access in an underserved rural community. It's a big change for a woman who started out as an engineer, returned to medical school, then embarked on a career dedicated to providing care to the indigent and underserved."

Dr. Stonewall McCuiston, a medicine and pediatrics physician in Kankakee - "Dr. McCuiston has endeared himself in the Kankakee and rural communities in the area by serving for over 15 years in a variety of areas. He moved to the area from Chicago and has made many contributions to the local community by participating in numerous civic organizations. Dr. McCuiston is truly an asset to the medical profession by advocating for better health and going beyond the call by showing a love for people. His respect for his colleagues and giving the best care to his patients speaks to his high quality of commitment to the profession of medicine."

Dr. Sajjan Nemani, a neurology physician in Centralia - "Dr. Nemani is a consummate health professional. He not only is an excellent doctor but he is highly respected by his peers and the entire community. He is a good family man, a pillar in the community, and the city of Centralia is better off with Dr. Nemani as one of its residents. We sincerely hope that he and his family continue to serve the Centralia area with his kindness, compassion and wisdom for many years to come."

Dr. Dennis Palmer, an internal medicine physician in Aledo - "In his 30 years of service to the community and patients, Dr. Palmer has exemplified the finest aspects of a quality physician and a caring human being. Dr. Palmer has always maintained a 'patient first' philosophy. As an independent practitioner in the community, Dr. Palmer continues to be one of the hospital's strongest supporters. He has been a major contributing factor to the successful recruitment and retention of new clinic physicians as well as the expansion of healthcare services in Mercer County. He has been and continues to be the backbone of this community."

Dr. Lawrence J. Rossi Sr., a former physician in Hopedale who passed away in 2001 - "He was a true visionary of uncommon talent who was ahead of his time in identifying the needs of patients in rural communities. I personally remember Dr. Rossi relating how he and his wife, Lorayne, mortgaged about all they had to start the Hopedale Medical Complex but were convinced

that this sacrifice would someday pay great rewards. Little did he know then just how great a success his hard work and commitment would mean to this rural community."

Dr. Secundino Rubio, a family medicine physician in Salem - "Dr. Rubio has dedicated his life to his patients, Salem Township Hospital, and the surrounding communities in the Salem area since 1965. He possesses a vast knowledge base and great intellect. He listens to his patients with a compassionate heart and his primary focus is the patient's best interest. We are thankful of having the privilege of Dr. Rubio serving the area for the past 41 years. He is our leader as well as our friend."

Dr. Thomas Staton, a family medicine physician in Metropolis – "Dr. Staton is very active in our community and region. He volunteers at the St. Nicholas Clinic in Paducah, Ky., to assist the working poor of western Kentucky and southern most Illinois. He makes 'home visits' to those individuals within the community who are unable to come to his office for their medical needs. He certainly represents the 'best' with his outstanding abilities, insight, leadership skills and willingness to assist others."

Dr. Shokry Tawfik, a family medicine physician in Lena - "Dr. Tawfik is a well respected and integral member of the Lena community, where he has been practicing for more than 22 years. As an expatriate from Egypt, he has not only assimilated to our community, but has become a pillar. Having raised his two children there with his wife, Amal, and being an active church and community member, no one could believe that his land of origin was other than rural Midwest Illinois. Dr. Tawfik is a master of his craft as a family doctor. He epitomizes the ideals of compassion and concern."