

Steve Anderson, PT, DPT

Editor's Note: The purpose of the prestigious Dicus Award is to acknowledge a single member whose contributions to the PPS, at both the section level and the APTA level, like those of Robert G. Dicus for whom the award is named, have been of exceptional value. The 2010 Dicus Award winner is Steve Anderson, PT, DPT. Mr. Anderson was president of the PPS from 2002 through 2008 and currently serves as CEO of Therapeutic Associates, Incorporated, based in Seattle, Washington. This is the text of his acceptance speech given November 3, 2010, at the 2010 PPS Annual Conference & Exposition in Washington, D.C.



I'd like to thank the Awards Committee for choosing me as the recipient of this year's Dicus Award and to the PPS Board for believing I am worthy of such recognition. I am aware that there is a recommendation process for this award and I'd like to thank those who brought my name forward. Many of you know I have deep roots in this section and this specific award. Jim McKillip and Robert Dicus started Therapeutic Associates, of which I'm currently the CEO. They were true pioneers in private practice physical therapy back in the early '50s. I never met Bob Dicus, for he had passed away from ALS before I came along, but I was fortunate enough to consider Jim as a mentor. His stories of Bob Dicus, Charles Magistro, and himself working on the vision and doing the hard work to form this section have guided me throughout my career. Their vision is the reason we all sit in this room today as private practitioners.

I have come to realize that often it is the little things in our lives that make the biggest impact on who we become. Often people throughout our life say or do things that they may not even remember they did, but their words or actions had a profound impact on us. These simple acts have served as guiding lights throughout my personal life and professional career. They have touched me in ways that push me to reach for excellence, invest in the future, and leave behind a legacy I can be proud of. I would like to share some of these stories where the little things have meant the world to me.

- I actually went off to college to be a dentist! If I was going to be a dentist I figured I better see what a day in the life of a dentist is like. After one day of shadowing a dentist I decided I did not want to look down the throats of people all day. What I discovered was that I had a passion for the medical field and what I liked about dentistry was that most dentists at the time owned their own business. Once I realized physical therapists could do that, I knew that I

had found my way. Being a physical therapist felt so right. I was excited for my future. A professor at my college who had graduated from Northwestern University and arrogantly referred to it as the "Harvard of the Midwest" and who said only the best of the best could go there happened to be the adviser for careers in health care. I was excited to meet with him and get his assistance on my way to physical therapy school. After the second visit he told me he didn't think I had a chance of getting into physical therapy school and recommended I consider a different career. Needless to say, I was crushed! Telling me "no" motivated me even more, and I went on to figure out what I needed to do to get into physical therapy school. I'll never forget how proud I was to walk up to him and announce that not only had I been accepted to physical therapy school but it was at Northwestern University!

It's the little things, not the big things, that shape who we become.

My family has believed in me and supported me from the very beginning. My dad instilled in us kids that you could accomplish anything you wanted if you were willing to pay the price.

- When I was heading off to physical therapy school from Seattle to Chicago with my wife Sharon and everything we owned in the back of a Datsun 240 Z, my dad came out to say goodbye and handed me an envelope with exactly \$462 in it. I remember the exact amount because I knew in my heart that he had just given me every dollar available to him at that time. Unconditional support from a parent, mentor, or friend who believes in you sets up a foundation for success.

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I learned early how rewarding it is to give back to your community. Sharon and I have worked hard to teach our children the gift of giving and helping others in need.

- ▶ In the early '90s, I was president of the Board of Southwest Youth and Family Services in my area. Our agency was in a rundown slum. Our board thought about how can we convince these kids we care about them if we want them to come to this dump. So we set out to raise money to build a new facility. When we talked to community and political leaders they felt our goal was admirable but didn't think it was possible. After 2 years of hard work and effort, we did raise \$1.5 million and built a beautiful new building. We had a wonderful dedication ceremony on the front steps with the mayor of Seattle and many local and national politicians and community leaders in attendance. After the ceremony, Sharon and our three young children went on a tour of the building with the rest of the community. As we entered the agency, a 10-year-old African American boy came bounding out of a classroom and said, "Would you like a tour of the Anderson Family Education Center?" Our eyes went from the excited boy to the plaque on the wall that had our family name on it. My kids' jaws dropped and they looked at me and realized it was named after us. The look on their faces let me know they had experienced the joy of giving to others.

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- ▶ Colleagues and friends have asked me why I got involved in government affairs and the political process. My interest was launched in 1968! I know that shows my age. 1968 was a pivotal year for this country and also for me personally. Five years before that as a 7-year-old my dad took me to see President John F. Kennedy speak. I don't remember what he said, but I was moved by the excitement of the people and the passion of the event. Four months later I walked home from school and walked into my house to see my parents crying in front of the television set. Our president had been assassinated. Now jumping forward to 1968, I remember waking up in the morning and again trying to understand the shock and horror of hearing that Martin Luther King Jr. had died the same way. That same year about five of my fifth-grade classmates and I decided that we would choose a presidential candidate in that election year and root for our choice and see who would win in November. Since I had seen President Kennedy in person, my choice was Bobby Kennedy. As we watched TV and learned about the candidates, we all latched on to our

choice. Then it happened again, my guy got taken out. All of a sudden the world seemed pretty scary. I had no idea what to do, but from that day on I would dedicate my life to try and fight injustice and do what I could to bring about positive change. I embraced the concept that even small things could make a difference. Four decades later, my trips to Washington are to honor the belief that in my chosen profession of physical therapy, my small contribution of time and effort can change the world in a positive way and preserve private practice.

Bruce Hornsby wrote a song titled "That's the Way It Is," and the refrain resonates with my view of the world. The lyrics argue, "That's the way it is, some things will never change, that's just the way it is." While performing the song, at this point Bruce pauses and then almost as if he is pleading with the audience he sings an impassioned plea, "Ah, but don't you believe it!" I will never settle for "that's just the way it is." This is no time to sit back and get complacent. Private practitioners are facing difficult challenges. Yet think of the obstacles Bob Dicus faced in creating the world of private practice physical therapy. It's time to get creative, embrace change, and envision a future where private practice thrives in health care reform.

There is never going to be a perfect stretch of time to volunteer and serve our profession. It takes a lot of time to own a business. How do you do it all?

- ▶ My wife Sharon and I were attending the PPS Conference in Memphis, and at a reception we were talking with one of my partners, Kelly Reed. She was telling the story of how a few months earlier we were at our annual directors' retreat and part of the program was to bring back our retired partners and hear from them about their experiences during their careers. Near the end of the 2-hour session, one of our directors asked them, "Do you have any regrets during your career?" All five stated they had wished they'd spent more time with their families and questioned the sacrifices they had made. Kelly said, "Isn't that profound. Doesn't it make you think about our professional lives?" Sharon looked up at me and said, "You wouldn't have to say that!" No words could have validated me more as a husband and a father! It takes a discipline of priorities that allow both family and work to be balanced. You can be successful at both.

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Sometimes the road ahead is not a straight line. We often have to take a crooked path with lots of ups and downs along the way.

- ▶ One day my son Dan and I were walking along the beach on Hood Canal, and he was at a tough stage of his life with lots of uncertainty. He was trying to get into physical

Robert G. Dicus Award Recipients

2009 Samuel Brown, PT, Monticello, KY	1993 Robert L. Doctor, PT (Posthumous), Englewood, CO
2008 Peter McMenemy, PT, MS, OCS, Chicago, IL	1992 Charles H. Hall, Jr. PT, Dayton, OH
2007 Louise Yurko, PT, MAEd, Newport, NC	1991 Jack D. Close, PT, Las Vegas, NV
2006 Connie Hauser, PT, DPT, ATC, Barbourville, KY	1990 Alphonso Amato, PT, St. Louis, MO
2005 Randy Roesch, PT, MBA, Steamboat Springs, CO	1989 Peter J. Lord. PT, Jacksonville, FL
2004 Francis J. Welk, PT, MEd, Bloomsburg, PA	1988 Francis X. Guglielmo, PT, Baton Rouge, LA
2003 Marilyn Moffat, PT, PhD, FAPTA, Ludlam, NY	1987 M. Tom Carlson, PT, Wharton, TX
2002 No recipient	1986 Lucy Buckley, PT, Chatham, MA
2001 Jayne Snyder, PT, MA, Lincoln, NE	1985 Royce Noland, PT, Alexandria, VA
2000 Michael Weinper, PT, Calabasas, CA	1985 Clem G. Eischen, PT, Gresham, OR
1999 Florence P. Kendall, PT, Severna Park, MD	1984 Jay M. Goodfarb, PT, Phoenix, AZ
1998 Helene M. Fearon, PT, Phoenix, AZ	1983 James B. McKillip, PT, Black Butte, OR
1997 Peter A. Towne, PT, Hamilton, OH	1982 Ben E. Johnston, PT, Knoxville, TN
1995 James A. Gould, III, PT (Posthumous), La Crosse, WI	1981 Charles M. Magistro, PT, Upland, CA
1994 Ernest A. Burch, Jr., PT, Baltimore, MD	

therapy school and was realizing the challenge of that, and he was also dating a young woman who he liked but knew she was not his long-term choice. He had no clear path of his future. I asked him if that had him down or pessimistic toward the future. He said, "I am optimistic and don't get down about it. I know if I want it bad enough and be patient I'll get into physical therapy school and I'll be a physical therapist. I'm also confident there is a woman out there for me to share my life with. The only thing I'm anxious about is how can I ever become as good a parent as you and Mom were to me and my two sisters?" His words let me know the choices I had made were sound.

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Praise and respect from your peers is very powerful.

- ▶ At a physical therapy conference—I don't really remember which one—I caught a glimpse of excited activity out of the corner of my eye, and here comes a very energetic Peter McMenemy waving at me to get my attention. He came up and said, "I have recently been elected to the top leadership position in my state chapter and I need to sit down with you and pick your brain about leadership. You are the first one I thought of when I wanted to improve my leadership skills." Respect from a peer of that caliber justifies all the hard work and sacrifice it takes to excel.

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Those who launched these stories with their actions or words probably don't even remember the conversation, but I hope they will accept my sincere appreciation for their influence on me.

The stories I've shared remind me of why I do what I do and why mediocrity is not something I will embrace. You have all

pushed me to believe in our profession. The power of a group that believes in themselves, each other, and the benefit we provide to our patients can accomplish amazing things. In Eric Liu's book, *Guiding Lights*, he sums up my belief by saying, "I truly have come to realize how little things ever change—and how little things can change everything."

It is an awesome responsibility to be trusted with the rehabilitation of a patient, to lead others while owning and running a clinic or a company, and to nurture those you love in your family as a parent or relative. You do have to be careful what you wish for, because someday you may just realize you are in the thick of it. The rewards of stepping up and accepting that responsibility can't be explained, they can only be felt. That feeling of making a difference is what makes me get up every morning and give all I have. I refuse to leave any effort behind. Right or wrong, with any action, I'm approaching it full speed ahead.

It means so much to me that many of my business partners are here today. Thank you so much for inspiring me every day. Your support allows me to give back as I take time and energy away from our company with the hope of benefiting many more in the profession. I'd like to throw a shout-out to my fellow colleagues who joined me in the first class of the EIM/PPS executive private practice management and tDPT program. You showed me I am still learning every day. I would especially like to acknowledge my family. Jill and Dan who are here today and Jaci who was unable to attend, you make everything worthwhile and give me purpose in everything I do. And finally, to my wonderful wife Sharon who supports me every step of the way. It is a gift that I have been able to walk through my entire adult life hand in hand with such a beautiful person. I am truly blessed.

There are far too many of you in the audience and in my life to thank individually, so I'd like to celebrate all of you with a quote from Sir Isaac Newton, who upon being recognized by his peers stated, "If by honoring me with this amazing award, you feel I have seen further, it is only because I've been standing on the shoulders of giants." ■