



# Sam Mendicino, DPM: Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

This year's Hall of Fame inductee is a "man for all reasons."

BY MARK H. HOFBAUER, DPM

Sam Mendicino has dedicated his life towards the advancement of the podiatric medical profession; specifically, Sam's fingerprint on podiatric medical education can be witnessed nationally and internationally with 40 years of previous externs, residents, fellows and colleagues, at one time under Sam's tutelage, now practicing the world over. As a student, a resident, board member, residency director, scientific chair, and foundation president, Sam has been a respected leader since day one.

Mendo, as he is affectionately known, is an awesome example of the American dream. Sam was born and raised in rural Western Pennsylvania. He was one of four children to grow up in a hard-working family living on the outskirts of the small coal mining town of Apollo, Pennsylvania. Ironically, both of his parents worked at the Western Pennsylvania Hospital, the same hospital where, many years later, Sam would fight the establishment to obtain privileges for local podiatrists and that would ultimately become the home of one of the most influential podiatric surgical residency training programs in the country.

Sam was an outstanding wrestler and baseball player at Kiski High School and he excelled academical-



Dr. Sam Mendicino

ly as well. His acceptance to Dartmouth, however rewarding, was also a disappointment in that his finances of the day were not sufficient to matriculate. Sam entered the University of Pittsburgh in the fall of 1975. During those college summers, Sam took his hard-working entrepreneurial skills to the Jersey shore, where for years he guarded the beaches of the Atlantic coast with his close friend Ed Kernick. Ed's father, Dr. Edward Kernick Sr.,

was one of the early founding fathers of the Podiatry Hospital of Pittsburgh and became one of Sam's early mentors.

It was during these early formidable years at the University of Pittsburgh when Sam became interested in podiatry. While shadowing physicians at the Western Pennsylvania Hospital, Sam was befriended by a pediatrician who had recommended podiatry to Sam. At that time he began to shadow local podiatrists and visited the Podiatry Hospital of Pittsburgh. The first surgical case that Sam observed at the Podiatry Hospital was a cavus foot surgery reconstruction. It was at this point that Sam knew that podiatric medicine was for him. He researched the profession, reviewed numerous books, ultimately applying to podiatry school. He visited Chicago and fell in love with the city. In the fall of 1975, Sam entered the Illinois College of Podiatric Medicine, and it was there where he discovered and developed his leadership ability. At ICPM, Sam was active in student politics and multiple medical societies while performing at the highest level academically as well.

Upon graduation from ICPM in 1983, Sam found himself at the highly regarded Harris County Podiatric Surgical Residency program in Hous-

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ton, Texas. At that time, Harris County was one of only a small number of two-year residency training programs and was under the direction of Dr. Marianne J. Filippoa. It was at this point in Sam's life where opportunity

eradicate all of the barriers that had faced podiatrists in obtaining privileges there.

In a great successful story like this, the hero undoubtedly takes some punches along the way. Such was the case with Sam's first surgical procedure at the hospital. Sam had

of-the-art reconstructive foot and ankle procedures performed anywhere in the world are done at the Western Pennsylvania Hospital... by podiatrists.

Sam is quick to acknowledge many of the mentors he encountered along the way, many of whom have had a profound effect on Sam's career and his leadership style. He gives an enormous amount of credit to Dr. Allen Jacobs. Sam's deep respect for Dr. Jacobs stems from his true medicine-oriented approach to diagnosing and treating patients with foot and ankle problems. Dr. Lowell Weil, Sr., an icon, both nationally and internationally, led with a respectful educated, gentleman-like style; Sam learned a great deal and credits this relationship with shaping his leadership style.

Sam will admit that he has had many mentors for many different reasons. His respect for Dr. Morris Tatar, the founder of the Podiatry Hospital of Pittsburgh, runs deep. When educating residents in today's world, a world in which you have

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and preparation collided. While in Houston, Sam excelled in working on cases involving new reconstructive techniques and forged many relationships with attendings and fellow residents, many of which have lasted to this day.

When it became time for Sam to determine where he would practice, he purchased a large map of the United States and started his research. He placed in X on every city where he knew he could not get himself to go. He then placed a red pin on the map in every city that already had a podiatrist. He then began to research those cities that obviously had no red pins. Because of his love of the Pittsburgh Steelers and the fact that Holiday Park Pennsylvania still had no podiatrist, Sam made his way back home to Pittsburgh and opened up a private practice. It was home, it was familiar, and it was where he needed to make his start.

Sam immediately established a surgical-only practice. As typical leaders do, he started giving back. He became a member of the Podiatry Hospital of Pittsburgh surgical residency training committee where he worked from 1985 until 1992. The stories of his early days in Pittsburgh are still popular today. Sam single-handedly established podiatry divisions at Citizens General Hospital and the Western Pennsylvania Hospital. At that time, the Western Pennsylvania Hospital was one of the largest teaching institutions in Pittsburgh. It took three years of relentless effort on Sam's part to break down the door and to

scheduled a young woman for a closing base wedge osteotomy. On the day of the procedure, he was relegated to a minor procedure room and the anesthesiologist refused to put his patient to sleep. It was no issue for Sam; he performed a regional block and completed the case seamlessly. As Sam's volume increased and anesthesia's loss of revenue became obvious, Sam finally obtained his own dedicated operating room and an an-

esthesiologist to boot. The final hospital privilege battle had been won.

The story here would not be complete without a little orthopedic turmoil. It was during the early days of Sam's tenure at West Penn that an orthopedic surgeon on staff had performed a bunionectomy, admitted the patient, and out of disrespect, consulted Sam to cut the patient's toenails. It was not long after that Sam returned the favor and consulted that same orthopedic surgeon to cut the fingernails of one of Sam's surgical admissions. It was at this point, needless to say, that a truce was established and the beginning of a wonderful relationship with orthopedics survives to this day. Today, some of the most progressive state-

the ability to practice freely and where the opportunity for privilege exists, Sam will often remind everyone of how things used to be, and he usually accomplishes this in the form of a story. In the early days of podiatry in Pittsburgh, Dr. Tatar once wrote a prescription for a patient for Neosporin G cream. That same day, police showed up at his door for writing a prescription without a license. Fortunately, Dr. Tatar's patients at the time were many of the rich and famous of Pittsburgh, including one Sophie Masloff, the mayor of the city. Needless to say Dr. Tatar did just fine; however, Sam will never let us forget how these early true pioneers of podiatry worked and sacrificed

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endlessly to allow us the opportunity that we all have before us today.

Sam's leadership, participation, and commitment contributions to the profession are almost too numerous to list. He has been the residency director at the West Houston Medical Center podiatric surgical residency program (formerly Harris County) since 1995. As a residency educator, Sam demanded that residents knew the personal things that mattered about patients, and not just the surgical pathology. If you did not know the patient's age, medical history, maybe a little bit about their life or their children, then you just were not going to participate in that patient's care. It was only after Sam knew that the resident took the time to

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understand the patient, that the resident was then privileged to operate on that person. It was during this time that Sam established the Greater Texas Education Foundation, in part to support an ever-growing residency program and to allow for continued podiatric medical education for physicians locally, nationally, and internationally.

Sam's International seminars today allow for camaraderie and education among like-minded colleagues at awesome destinations around the world. Sam himself has spent years traveling throughout Europe and the Middle East teaching new techniques to foot and ankle surgeons. Sam's work with the German Foot Surgery Foundation helped to introduce the Lapidus procedure to Europe, and today it is one of the most commonly performed techniques for hallux abducto valgus deformity utilized in that part of the world.

Sam has spent years helping to advance the American Board of Foot and Ankle Surgery (formerly ABPS). He started as an oral examiner in the early 1990s. He spent years on the Foot and Rear Foot & Ankle Reconstructive question-writing committees. He has been part of the credentialing committee and the residency education committee, and he spent 15 years as the exam chairman, making him the longest-running exam chair to date. His service to ABPS includes the ultimate commitment, first as a member of the board two separate times and ultimately as President of the Board of Directors.

Sam's tenure at ABPS came at the most opportune time. It was then that both the challenges and opportunities needed to confront the board met head on. Sam called upon other leaders to engage and to help change

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the course of board certification. At the same time, he encouraged younger physicians to step up and take a leadership role and to understand the importance of giving back. Sam's time on the board at ABPS ushered in a change to the status quo, including a name change to the American Board of Foot and Ankle Surgery, the appointment of a new executive director, as well as making

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major changes to the exam process, including eliminating the oral part of the examination.

Sam has served as the Texas Podiatric Medical Association President and has spent years fighting the battle to maintain ankle privileges in the state of Texas. To this day, Sam still feels that his most important accomplishment has been his ability to help open up hospitals to podiatrists and to expand the scope of practice for foot and ankle surgeons. Sam's influential leadership has helped to advance the mission of both ACFAS and ABFAS, guided in part by his vision that had been born out of years of study, hard work, experience and commitment.

Sam is one of those individuals who always says yes and he never asks what's in it for him. So was the case when ACFAS came calling. Sam spent two years as scientific chair of the national meeting and has served as chairman of the surgical skills committee.

Sam's progeny of residents include three ABFAS presidents, two ABFAS board members, state society presidents, numerous residency directors, and fellowship directors. I believe that it is important that we judge a program by how the people leave that program and become leaders. Dr. Al Ng and Dr. Keith Jacobson are just two examples of the results of Sam's educational leadership. Previous residents from Sam's program in Houston now practice in all 50 states as well as Puerto Rico.

Sam has long exemplified a level of commitment to his residents, his colleagues, his community, and his profession that should serve as a model for others for years to come. The Holy Grail for educational leaders has forever been to seek the magic formula to engage other educators, alumni, employees, activists and community leaders towards solutions to solve the problems of the greater good. Sam has mastered this process, due in part to the commitment of all of those whom he has helped and the respect he has garnered.

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Dr. Mendicino's published works are too numerous to list; however, it should be noted that at a time when podiatric literature was mundane and repetitive, Sam authored a paper in the early 1990s describing a fibular strut graft for a giant cell tumor of the first metatarsal that ultimately changed the way many of us did surgery. This paper allowed most of us to begin to think "out-of-the-box" and encouraged more people to publish. It truly stimulated those in the foot and ankle surgery field to push the envelope, ultimately helping scores of patients over the years.

### **Tributes**

#### ***Christopher Lamy, DPM***

Dr. Samuel Mendicino has had a remarkable impact on the podiatric profession through his greater than three decades of service and practice. I have had the opportunity to work with him in many capacities through professional organizations and educational groups over some of this time. He is remarkably modest regarding his

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**“Only a few have contributed effectively for as many years to the podiatric profession as Dr. Mendicino.”—Lamy**

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contributions to podiatry's advancement, politics, and education in a discipline of studying and caring for the lower extremity issues. He has worked to better our examination process and played a pivotal role in the name change of ABFAS.

On the local level, his efforts in defending the scope of practice in the state of Texas have been important to our colleagues in Texas, but also are of national importance. Dr. Mendicino's contribution to education is far reaching. He has trained a great many podiatrists in his long career. Many of the individuals he has trained have moved into roles where they have also contributed greatly to the podiatric profession, following in the footsteps of their mentor. Dr. Mendicino has advanced knowledge and education of the foot and ankle through his teaching and directing continuing educational programs nationally and internationally. Only a few have contributed effectively for as many years to the podiatric profession as Dr. Mendicino.

#### ***Alan Ng, DPM***

Samuel Mendicino—my residency director, my mentor, my second dad, and my friend. I met Sam in 1998 when I was fresh out of podiatry school; he was to be my residency director for my three years of training. Little did I know he would be one of the most influential people in my life. Not only did he train and teach me how to be a

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foot and ankle surgeon and physician, but he also taught me about life and politics. He was the one I went to with questions and ideas not only in training but also in life after residency and fellowship. He gave back to the profession more than anyone I know, and gave himself to his residents and fellows to ensure that they were successful in practice and in life.

Over the years, he became one of my closest friends and has been and will always be a mentor to me. There is no one I look up to more than Sam, and I credit him with

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**“Sam doesn’t mince words, he doesn’t try to gloss over his mistakes; he remains ethical and will not compromise that position.”—Hetman**

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my success in life. He has always put others before himself and has advanced our profession more than anyone I know. I have felt honored to be trained by him and feel honored to call him my friend and mentor.

### **Jeff Hetman, DPM**

I first met Sam in December 1992. I was halfway through with my first year of residency, and he was 10 years into private practice, having graduated from the same residency program. He was returning to Houston after establishing a successful practice in Pittsburgh. We spent many hours together professionally, in the operating room, at lectures, and during office hours. We also spent countless hours together exchanging stories of childhood, high school career paths, college, and eventual entry into podiatry and ultimately to the same residency program. The thing that stood out about Sam to me back then and still does today is that he is blatantly, almost to a fault, an honest man.

Sam doesn’t mince words, he doesn’t try to gloss over his mistakes; he remains ethical and will not compromise that position. Because of this, he has become a world-class educator, ambassador, and friend of the profession of podiatric medicine and surgery. As he did for me, he has guided countless young physicians through the murky waters that we call medicine. He has done this willingly and with some personal sacrifice. I believe his many contributions are often overlooked by the profession, or rather taken for granted, but not by me.

### **Charles “Stan” Churchwell, DPM**

I have known Sam since 1980, as we were both involved in school politics at each of our respective schools. We became roommates in residency and have

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remained friends for almost 38 years. We probably have spoken no less than weekly for all these years. Sam has become a Podiatric Life Coach to

Sam has a knack of using wit to break down barriers, which wins confidence and trust. His calculated approach to life has been demonstrated in his numerous roles such as defense expert witness and past President

always appreciate his ability to take one more phone call and find a silver lining inside most problems. **PM**

**“Sam has a knack of using wit to break down barriers, which wins confidence and trust.”—Churchwell**

so many. His forte is taking underdogs and creating superstars. He is the ultimate people’s person. I have seen him transform from inquisitive student to inspiring teacher/professor. He has an ability to strategize solutions for difficult problems without compromise.

of TPMA, and with his involvement with the Greater Texas Podiatric Medical Foundation Residency programs. I remember him drafting the plan for GTEF on my kitchen table in the late 1980s. He kept saying there has to be a long-term plan to educate, guide, and financially support residents. I will



**Dr. Hofbauer** has been practicing in Pittsburgh for 27 years. He trained under Sam Mendicino at the Podiatry Hospital of Pittsburgh and completed his AO Trauma fellowship at the Free University of Berlin as

well as the Regional Hospital in Interlaken, Switzerland. He is a Fellow of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, Director of the Mon Valley Foot and Ankle Reconstructive Surgery Fellowship program, and President of The Greater Pennsylvania Education Foundation. He practices with The Orthopedic Group at the Monongahela Hospital in Pittsburgh.

## Honorable Mention

**C**ongratulations to the following podiatrists, alphabetically listed, who received the next highest number of votes in the 35th Annual *Podiatry Management* Lifetime Achievement Award.

Terence Albright, DPM, Chicago, IL  
 H. “Bunny Brown”, DPM, Heber Springs, AR  
 James Christina, DPM, Bethesda, MD  
 Wesley Daniel, DPM, Gainesville, GA  
 Lawrence DiDomenico, DPM, Youngstown, OH  
 Chet Evans, DPM, Miami Shores, FL  
 John Guiliana, Hackettstown, NJ  
 Lawrence Lavery, Dallas, TX  
 Jeffrey Lehrman, Springfield, PA  
 Marc Lenet, DPM, Baltimore, MD  
 Leonard Levy, DPM, Fort Lauderdale, FL  
 Kenneth Malkin, DPM, Boynton Beach, FL

Bryan Markinson, New York, NY  
 John Mattiacchi, DPM, Philadelphia, PA  
 Nancy Parsley, DPM, Chicago, IL  
 Jeffrey Robbins, DPM, Cleveland, OH  
 Lee Sanders, DPM, Lebanon, PA  
 Harold Schoenhaus, DPM, Philadelphia, PA  
 Alan Sherman, DPM, Boca Raton, FL  
 Lloyd Smith, DPM, Newton Centre, MA  
 Frank Spinosa, DPM Albuquerque, NM  
 Kathleen Stone, DPM, Glendale, AZ  
 Ross Taubman, DPM, Brentwood, TN  
 Harold Vogler, DPM, Tampa, FL  
 Stephanie Wu, DPM, North Chicago, IL

Congratulations to following individuals, alphabetically listed, who received the next highest votes in the non-podiatrist category.

Dorothy Cahill-McDonald  
 Don Canada  
 SuEllen Dercher  
 Charles Gibley, Jr., PhD  
 Herman Hammerschmidt  
 Jason Kraus  
 Kevin Kruse  
 Louis Levine  
 Chris Mahaffey

Moraith North  
 Phil Park  
 Cindy Pezza  
 Jimelle Rumberg, PhD  
 Mary Pulliam  
 Michael Schwartz  
 Leonard Thaler  
 Alan Tinkleman  
 Norman Wallis, PhD