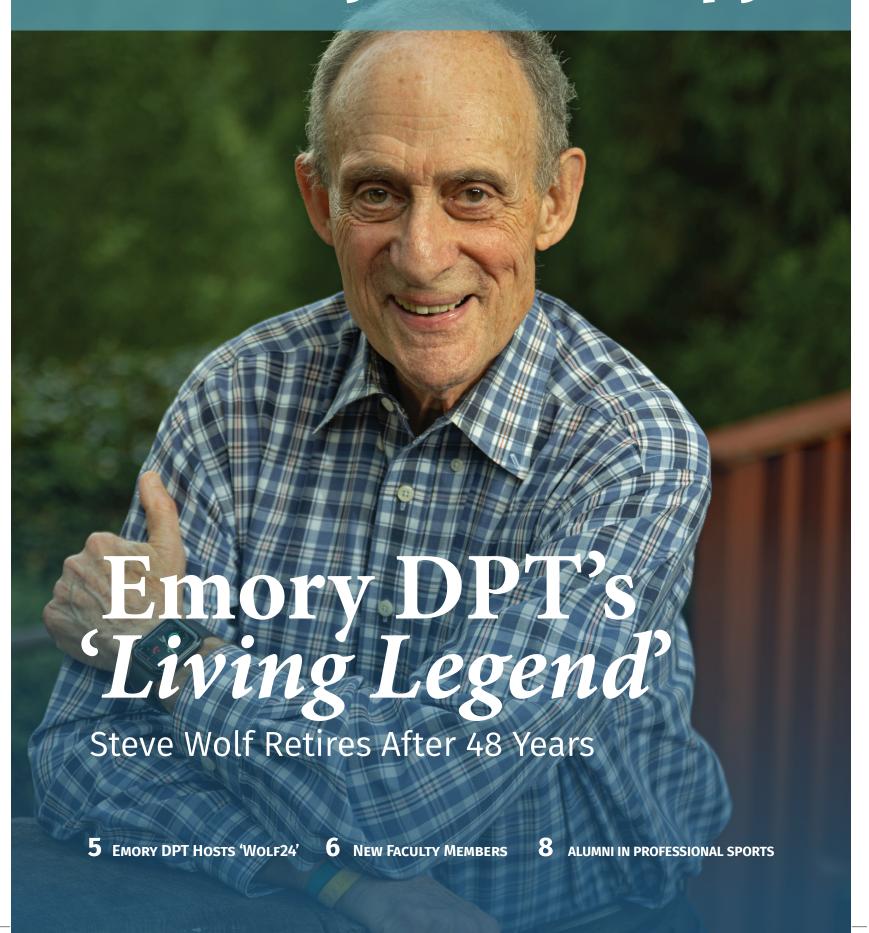
EMORY Physical Therapy



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Emory Division of PT Soars in National Rankings as Faculty, Alumni Blaze Trails



Beginning with an 81-year-old "living legend" who made an indelible imprint on our profession around the world to the inspiring stories of three young Emory Division of Physical Therapy graduates who are fulfilling their dreams in professional sports, this year's issue of Emory Physical Therapy is a tribute to some of our wonderful people, from various generations, who make our program so exceptional. It is these people — along with so many other talented, dedicated faculty, students and alumni — who are the reason that the Emory Division of Physical Therapy was ranked #4 nationally out of 245 doctoral physical therapy programs in the country in the most recent U.S. News & World Report study of the country's heath schools. As your director, I couldn't be prouder.

In national physical therapy circles, our cover subject, Steve Wolf, is synonymous to the Emory Division of Physical Therapy as baseball legend Ted Williams is to Steve's beloved Boston Red Sox. When Steve joined the Emory faculty in 1975, Gerald Ford was our nation's president, 8-track players were the way that people listened to purchased music in their cars, a U.S. postage stamp was a dime, a loaf of bread was \$.33 and the Captain and Tennille's "Love Will Keep Us Together" was Billboard's top song.

But despite his incredible longevity, don't confuse Steve with a person whose age and success made him complacent or out of touch. Before he retired last year after 48 years at Emory, his colleagues here remained in awe of a man who, to his last day on the job, demonstrated an insatiable desire to keep learning new technology and stay on the cutting edge of everything that advances the physical therapy profession.

And when he wasn't in the lab in his quest to learn something new, he was intentionally mentoring scores of rehabilitation researchers, not just at Emory, but nationwide. Steve's legacy in our field will undoubtedly endure for many generations to come and we are proud to showcase the fact that Steve is an Emory man who will go down as one of the most influential researchers in the history of our profession.

Since blazing trails is what we do at Emory, we're proud to feature another history-making alum, 2016 DPT graduate Vanessa Brooks, DPT, SCS, ATC, CSCS, NREMT, who in 2019, became the first Black female physical therapist/athletic trainer in the National Basketball Association's 78-year history.

After leaving Atlanta to serve both a sports PT residency and fellowship, many had discouraged Brooks from pursuing her goal to work in the NBA because sadly, no one who looked like her had ever worked in male-dominated NBA training rooms. But, like so many of our graduates, grit, perseverance and excellence in our field won the day as Brooks was hired by the Oklahoma City Thunder and recently completed a successful five-year tenure there. We are so proud of Vanessa and look forward to seeing her back on the NBA hardwood this season with her new team, the Los Angeles Lakers.

Also in this issue, we're pleased to introduce three of the division's newest faculty members, Zachary Danziger, PhD, Colin Grove, PT, DPT, MS, PhD and David Kempfert, DPT, PhD, ATC/L, FAAOMPT. These talented individuals exemplify our vision to not only train the next generation of the best, young physical therapists, but also to be on the cutting edge of rehab research including how to best integrate artificial intelligence into the healing and recovery process. You'll enjoy getting to know Zach, Colin and David and see that we not only hired some of the brightest minds in our field, but also some of the best people.

In June, the division welcomed 57 new students. The diverse group of learners come from 22 states and four countries, including China, Chile, Mexico and India. Forty-nine percent of the new cohort are minorities while 77 percent of the entire class are female and 23 percent male. Students came from 42 national and international colleges and universities. With our excellent faculty guiding and mentoring them in this academic journey, we know that our students will be positioned for success in May 2027.

I hope you enjoy this publication and sincerely thank you for all that you do to make the Emory Division of Physical Therapy one of the best doctoral PT programs in the country. Let me close by repeating the words of Vanessa Brooks after she reunited with her Emory classmate who had been hired by another NBA team: "Look at what being at Emory can do." You are so right, Vanessa.

George Fulk, PT, PhD, FAPTA Professor and Director

Visit us online at **emorydpt.org**



Contact us:

Division of Physical Therapy 1462 Clifton Rd. NE, Suite 312 Atlanta, GA 30322, 404-712-5660

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George Fulk, PT, PhD, FAPTAProfessor and Director, Division of Physical Therapy

Beth Davis, PT, DPT, MBA, FNAP

Editorial Adviser and Associate Professor, Division of Physical Therapy

Kevin Bloye Editor

Angela Vellino Art Director

Christopher Oquendo Photographer

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EMORY Physical Therapy







IN THIS ISSUE FALL 2024

2 FEATURE STORY

Steve Wolf Retires from Emory DPT After 48 Years

From CIMT, the Wolf Motor Function Test and the use of tai chi for reducing falls, Emory DPT professor leaves an indelible mark on the physical therapy field.

5 ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Three-Day Emory Event Roasts, Honors a 'Living Legend'

Emory DPT, joined by giants in the national PT field, pay tribute to Steve Wolf and a research career spanning more than 50 years.

On the Cover

Long-time Emory Division of Physical Therapy Professor Steve Wolf retires from Emory after 48 years.

6 NEW FACULTY

New Faculty Members Bring a Midwestern Flavor to Emory DPT

Emory's three new faculty members, all from the Midwest, share a love for research, teaching and family.

Q ALUMNI PROFILES

Emory DPT Alumni Shine in Professional Sports

In the demanding 24/7 world of professional sports, three Emory DPT alumni continue to make an impact in injury treatment and prevention.

AND MORE...

Division Awards 11

Student Awards 12

Alumni Notes 13



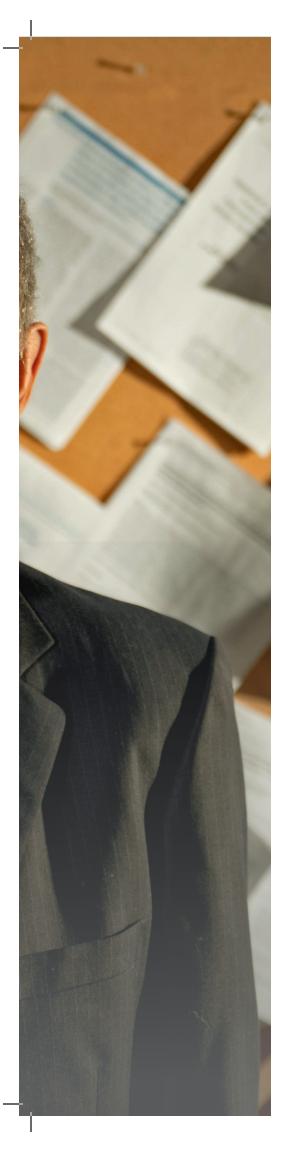
clinical trials or are serving in leadership roles at

academic institutions around the country.

1975 and carved out an astonishing 48-year career

member before retiring Aug. 31, 2023. While many current faculty members cite Wolf as a key factor

as an Emory Division of Physical Therapy faculty



For Wolf, the accolades are nice, but that's not what motivates him. Now that his career has moved towards other ventures, he wants to be remembered as a role model — someone who led by example and encouraged his colleagues to be passionate about their convictions and to give it their best.

"You've got to give it the best you can because you never want to look back and say, 'Why didn't I try harder?" says Wolf. "Basically, that's what I'd like to think that others see in me."



A Physical Therapy Pioneer

For Wolf, a career defined by hard work and a dogged determination to push his research past traditional boundaries took shape shortly after his arrival in Atlanta. About 18 months after convincing Wolf to return to Atlanta after his fellowship at the prestigious Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Basmajian moved back to his native Canada and left the young physical therapist with a research project that examined how well people with stroke responded to muscle feedback training.

Wolf's success in developing predictors for patients led to exploring how patients with stroke would respond if you made them use their impaired upper extremity by immobilizing their good limb. This cutting-edge approach later morphed into a six-year national clinical trial in the 2000s, the EXCITE Stroke Trial, in which Wolf teamed with the University of Alabama-Birmingham's Edward Taub to develop CIMT. The trial cemented Wolf's star status within the rehabilitation field and spawned other national trials that continued to advance recovery for people with stroke. Wolf calls the project, which has enhanced the lives of stroke survivors across the world, his greatest career accomplishment.

"It was a very successful national trial," Wolf recalls. "It was perhaps the first large national trial of a non-pharmacological approach to rehabilitation and stroke that produced substantially positive results. We were able to establish criteria of who will respond and who wouldn't. It is now a routine clinical procedure."

Emory DPT Professor Edelle Field-Fote, PT, PhD, FAPTA, who is nationally known for rehabilitation research for spinal cord injuries and views Wolf as a mentor, emphasized the importance of his work on CIMT.

"His work with the EXCITE project was just seminal in that it changed the way we think about improving upper extremity function in people with stroke," Field-Fote said. "And not only did it influence stroke, but it also influenced rehabilitation for spinal cord injury and for cerebral palsy to a very large extent."

Carolee Winstein, PhD, PT, FAPTA, a recently retired long-time faculty member at the University of Southern California Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy, published 26 articles with Wolf over about 25 years and served as a co-principal investigator on the EXCITE trial. In 1996, Winstein took a sabbatical and joined Wolf when he was leading the FICSIT (Frailty and Injuries Cooperative Studies of Intervention Techniques) group. Watching Wolf lead this massive national project, she recalled, was her most valuable leadership lesson.

"Steve would have weekly team meetings that he would chair and at that point, I'd never seen this before because I was doing my own research in my own lab with my own people," said Winstein, who would go on to lead the follow-up to EXCITE, the ICARE study. "By asking me to sit in on these FICSIT group meetings, it had a huge impact on me because he was showing me how to be a leader in a big multidisciplinary clinical trial. And I learned that communication was so, so important in allowing everybody at the table to express their opinions and to drive the direction of these projects."

Perhaps Wolf's most defining career trait is his willingness to take chances with projects that were not considered trendy or mainstream at the time.

In the mid-1980s, in response to a National Institute on Aging (NIA) request for sites to develop approaches to reduce falls in aging adults, Wolf partnered with a most unlikely person on the Emory faculty to craft a proposal: a biochemistry professor who, outside the classroom, was a tai chi grandmaster.



The proposal called for Wolf and his team to study two forms of rehabilitative treatment coming from opposite ends of the spectrum: new high-tech posturography machines versus tai chi, a martial arts form used by Chinese elders for more than 300 years.

"We had these dichotomous perspectives and we thought that either they're really going to think this is cool or they're going to think we're absolutely crazy," Wolf recalls. "We took a big chance in adding tai chi."

Much to Wolf's surprise, the NIA, an institute within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), selected his proposal, as well as seven others, from among many applications for funding. This was during a time when little attention or significance was attributed to alternative or complimentary medicine.

The end result? Wolf's study proved that tai chi was highly effective in reducing and delaying falls in the senior population.

"We learned that when individuals perform tai chi, they're linking their center mass with their center of gravity, so they can control the two together. And that makes you more aware of your posture and allows for stepping strategies and other behaviors to be engaged should you lose your balance," Wolf explains.

Nearly 40 years after the study, tai chi has become a popular form of exercise in many of the country's nursing homes and senior living facilities for its ability to enhance fitness, balance and flexibility.

"The tai chi project is a very good example of Steve's fearlessness and doing and saying what he thinks is right, consequences be damned," said Field-Fote.

Oddly enough, the career achievement that Wolf is least comfortable talking about is the procedure that bears his name, the Wolf Motor Function Test. It's not that Wolf isn't proud of the test—it's been validated against many other well-recognized tests and continues to stand the test of time—it's that the procedure was named after him without his knowledge. Originally named the Emory Motor Test when Wolf developed it in the 1980s, some of Wolf's colleagues helped add a qualitative assessment component to the test and renamed it the Wolf Motor Function Test as a way to honor their colleague. Wolf first read about the name change in a publication in 2000.

"I shy away from self-aggrandizement," Wolf says.

Instead, he has always been motivated by the "thrill of being one of the first people to learn something new" which, as a result, improved the lives of others.

"One of the things that I've always been fascinated in the inquiry process is that when you learn something, it even raises more questions," Wolf explained. "Some of those are worthy of pursuit and perhaps to some extent, I've been lucky in figuring out, 'Where should I go from here? What's the next logical sequencing?' It's a game in a way."

Legendary Father and Friend

Capping an illustrious career that spanned more than 50 years, Steven Wolf is inarguably one of the most decorated, well-known physical therapists in the world. In retirement, he still serves as a consultant on a national stroke rehab trial and was recently honored by Emory with the three-day Steven L. Wolf Research Symposium that culminated in a gala celebration with friends and family from throughout the country.

But for Wolf, his greatest career accomplishments pale in comparison to raising two successful sons and being a grandfather to their four children. His oldest son is an award-winning transplant nephrologist at a large health system in Atlanta and the other is a successful businessman based in Knoxville, TN. Both earned their undergraduate degrees at Emory.

Throughout his career, Wolf received many offers to lead physical therapy programs at other prestigious institutions across the country, but he was determined to stay and be the father he never had to his sons.

"When my sons were 5 and 2, I was divorced and as someone who grew up without a father— my dad died when I was 3—I vowed to myself that I would never leave my sons," Wolf explains. "I'm very proud of them. I'd rather talk about what they do than what I do anytime."

The list of Emory faculty members who are glad that Wolf stayed in Atlanta is long. Emory Department of Rehabilitation Medicine Associate Professor Michael Borich, PT, DPT, PhD, who Wolf recruited to Emory 11 years ago, marvels at the passion that Wolf maintained for learning and innovation and views Wolf as not just as a mentor, but a "father figure."

"When my mom passed away, the service was in Duluth, MN which is not the easiest place to get to," Borich recalls. "Steve showed up and he was there for that. He literally got on a plane that morning and returned that night. He came in just to be there for support. It is hard to overstate how dedicated and loyal he is to his family and friends."

Emory Department of Rehabilitation Professor Sarah Blanton, PT, DPT, who first met Wolf when she was a graduate student in 1991, credits Wolf with believing in her and continuously opening doors for her to advance her career whether it be presenting posters at a national society, getting published in national journals or participating in high-profile clinical trials.

Blanton will never forget how Wolf and his wife of 41 years, Lois, opened their home a few years ago to host her wedding — the same home, ironically, that Blanton's spouse grew up in.

"It shows what kind of person he really is," Blanton says. "He has always been there for me both professionally and personally."

Long-time Emory Department of Rehabilitation Professor Marie Johanson, PT, PhD, FAPTA, will never forget how Wolf, in his final years on the Emory faculty, poured into the students that she co-advised with Wolf as part of the division's new learning communities.

"Here's this giant in the field who would come into a learning community with a group of six or seven students and was always present and listened and imparted wisdom in a gentle way from the 30,000-foot view," Johanson recalled. "He could take a student problem and put it in a much broader, higher context and then talk to that student. I just thought it was a very powerful way to communicate and it showed a

great sense of humility to take his time to do that. I really admired that."

Winstein, who delivered the opening keynote at the Wolf Symposium and still keeps in constant touch with Wolf, recalls Wolf's sense of humor that brought needed levity to some high-pressure projects. During the EXCITE trial, a large group working on the project visited a Medieval Times dinner theater outside of Los Angeles.

"So, Steve decided that it would be great if we all wore a mitt on one hand while eating the meal with just the other hand." Winstein recalled.

The entire group of researchers accepted the challenge and ate the turkey drumstick and corn on the cob meal with mitts on their dominant hands — a night that those who were in attendance still talk about nearly 30 years later.

Today, at 81, Wolf, in keeping with his reputation for taking chances, is in the process of doing research for his first attempt at writing a book — a fictitious novel based on his own unique family experience that explores the journey of a person, who later in life, discovers a family that he didn't know existed.

"That doesn't sound like a big deal but what I'm proposing to do in this book is to write multiple endings with multiple outcomes so that the reader can then gather some introspection about why they feel the way they do as opposed to the other alternatives," Wolf explained.

Earlier this year, the Wolfs had a chance to travel to Italy for two weeks. They also enjoy time spent at their cabin in the North Georgia mountains. Despite the occasional down time, Lois insists that her husband, who walks, on average, about 12,000 steps a day, hasn't slowed a bit in retirement.

"He's busy all the time," she said. "He's always working on something. I really haven't noticed much difference."

When asked how he hopes that his colleagues remember him years down the road, Wolf recalled a recent conversation with a friend.

"Someone asked me a similar question: What would you like to have on your gravestone?" he said. "That's one thing I can answer because I did think about that a little bit. I want it to say, 'May the mention of my name bring a smile to the faces of my grandchildren.' That kind of says it all."



Long-time friends and colleagues Wolf and retired University of Southern California Professor Carolee Winstein published 26 articles together.

Emory, National PT Community Pay Tribute to Steve Wolf with Three-Day Symposium



Tony Delitto presented loyal Boston Red Sox fan Wolf a New York Yankees' iersey and cap.



Wolf with his sons, Joshua (left) and Adam (right).



Wolf's wife, Lois, dedicated the song "My Guy" to her husband of 41 years.

More than 150 people, several from other states, convened at the Emory campus in late August to pay homage to one of physical therapy's most successful, influential researchers, former long-time Emory Division of Physical Therapy Professor Steve Wolf.

The three-day Steven L. Wolf Research Symposium, nicknamed "Wolf24," kicked off with an evening welcome reception on Thursday night followed by a two-day scientific program that covered topics such as stroke rehabilitation and recovery, neurorehabilitation, mentored research direction and a session on science, administration and leadership. Wolf closed the Saturday morning session with an address titled, "Reflections on Past, Present and Future Frontiers of Rehabilitation."

The event concluded with a Saturday evening gala celebration in which Master of Ceremonies Tony Delitto, dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Health and Rehabilitation Science and close friend of Wolf's, shared a few of the practical jokes that Wolf played on him through the years including paying off a \$10 bet with just pennies and loaning Delitto a pair of socks on a road trip . . . with the toes cut out of the socks. As retribution at the gala, Delitto presented Wolf, an avid Boston Red Sox fan, with a New York Yankees' cap and a new Babe Ruth jersey and asked Wolf to put them on in front of the dinner crowd while Delitto playfully roasted Wolf. Wolf reluctantly obliged stated that wearing Yankees' apparel was a first — and a last — for him. Wolf's sons, Joshua and Adam, both Emory graduates, each paid loving tributes to their father.

"Thank you for being a family mentor to all of us," Joshua Wolf, M.D., said. "When we've come to you and asked questions, you've helped us actually think through the answers instead of just providing us the answers."

Joshua also talked about the emphasis that their father placed on education.

"You've always taught all of us the value of education and knowing that when you are educated, it's something that no one can take away from you," he said. "It's something that you'll have the rest of your life and will hopefully, impart that wisdom onto others."

Adam Wolf, a senior business executive based in Knoxville, TN recalled the words of wisdom that his dad imparted on his sons at an early age.

"My dad has always told us, 'If the expectations that you have of yourself are higher than those who evaluate you, then you will continue to make progress in whatever you pursue," Adam said.

Adam recalled asking his dad recently to list the three words or phrases that he hopes people think of when they remember him. Steve Wolf responded with the words "caring," "inspiring" and "role model."

"Cheers to you, Pop. You nailed it," Adam said. "Your legacy goes beyond those words. It's the impact you made on all of us." **EPT**

New Faculty Members Bring a *Midwestern Flavor to Emory DPT*



Zachary Danziger: Merging Neuroscience and Al

When George Fulk, PT, PhD, FAPTA, was appointed director of the Emory Division of Physical Therapy in 2022, he made it clear that part of his vision for the division

was to enhance its footprint in the marriage of rehabilitation research and artificial intelligence (Al).

Enter one of the division's newest faculty members, Zachary Danziger, PhD, who joined Emory in November 2023. For the past several years, Danziger, a native of Chicago who specializes in biomedical engineering, has dedicated himself to using mathematical modeling to understand how the nervous system controls the body — especially the bladder and urinary tract.

Danziger, who spent the past seven-and-a-half years at Florida International University, leads an NIH-funded project that is a combination of philosophy, mathematics and autonomic neuroscience.

"We were trying to use both traditional mathematics
— think Isaac Newton — and marry it to the more modern
mathematics like AI that everybody's talking about," Danziger
explained. "Our goal was to get these two things to play well
together, which is not always easy. That was one of the big
reasons that they brought me to Emory."

Danziger, who moved to Atlanta from Miami with his wife and four-year-old daughter, describes himself as an "in-myhead kind of guy" who gets joy, not in sports and outdoor activities, but reading, philosophy and writing.

"My wife has gotten me out for hiking and now I'm in the gym doing strength training, but it is strictly against my will," Danziger joked.

While Danziger will spend nearly all of his time at Emory conducting research, he has also been assigned to help the division develop a PhD program in physical therapy which is in its early stages.

"Dr. Fulk is really interested in that," Danziger said. "I've heard all the mission statements and everything and it's been fun to be part of it and get to shape how it looks."

For as long as he can remember, Danziger has always been interested in learning new things and when it was time to choose a career, he decided that neuroscience was the best way to keep growing.

"You're born into the world and you inherit all of these gifts that you had nothing to do with about human knowledge and they're given to you through education," he said. "People had to suffer to get to where we are for most of human history and we haven't had to. So, to be able to spend my life giving back and expanding that sphere of knowledge, I think it's noble work."

Colin Grove: Helping Patients Overcome Dizziness Through PT

Colin Grove, PT, DPT, MS, PhD, made his first-ever trip to the Emory campus in early 2023 to accompany his daughter on a college visit. His daughter chose Emory and started last fall. Much to her surprise, her dad chose Emory too, joining the Emory Division of Physical Therapy staff as an assistant professor in September 2023.

"She thought she was going away to school, but I faked her out and came here too," Grove joked.

Early in his undergraduate experience at Saint Louis University, Grove, a native of Belleville, IL, about 30 minutes southeast of St. Louis, had a chance to work with a physical therapist who was doing functional evaluations of athletes to identify susceptibilities to injuries and try to prevent them. He was hooked.

He intended to pursue a PT career in orthopedics and sports but changed his mind in a gross anatomy class where a spinal cord was being dissected. He was so fascinated by that, he switched to neurology.

Grove served as a physical therapist for UW Health in Madison, WI for 27 years before shifting from clinical practice to research. He earned a PhD in clinical investigation from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, then was a postdoctoral fellow for six months in Madison before spending more than two years as a postdoctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins University.

While at Hopkins, he learned of an available position at Emory that involved some teaching, but mostly research. He pursued the position and eventually made the move to Atlanta where he enjoys 10-minute bike rides to and from the Emory campus.

"The Emory campus is obviously beautiful," Grove said, "and you

don't feel like you're in a major city even though we're only a few miles from downtown. It feels like you're more in the forest than in the city."

Grove's research focus is primarily on vestibular rehabilitation, which deals with helping people overcome dizziness and balance problems which can impact so many areas of life leading to damaging falls and the inability to



"There have been limits to what our treatments can do," Grove explained, "and that's one of the things that drove me towards the PhD. We can try to design better ways to assess patients so that we can more quickly diagnose them and develop better ways to treat them so they can have an enhanced quality of life. Where our treatments are coming up short, I want to fill those gaps."

Outside of the research lab and classroom, Grove is a competitive age group triathlete focusing on swimming, biking and running. Although there are physical, mental and emotional benefits for Grove, he races for others by representing a global humanitarian organization. By the end of 2024, he will have completed more than 150 endurance events including 14 ultra-distance triathlons.

"It's something I have in common with my daughter," Grove said. "She's a runner and a triathlete too and so some of my finest memories racing are races that I've done with her."

David Kempfert: Motivating Students to Love PT

As a young man, David Kempfert, DPT, PhD, ATC/L, FAAOMPT, had a goal to go to medical school and be either an orthopedic or ER surgeon. That all changed following his undergraduate program when he was hired as a medical research intern.

"I did a research internship where I got to work with physical therapists as well as orthopedic surgeons," Kempfert recalled. "It was a joint effort with the surgeons, the therapists and me where we actually, one day, sat down and had a conversation as to what both professions could provide. I made the transition then."

Kempfert, the Emory Division of Physical Therapy's newest faculty member who joined as an assistant professor on May 1 this year, not only became a physical therapist, but also an occupational therapist and an athletic trainer. He has a PhD, is a Fellow in the American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapists and has gained two physical therapy board specializations — one in orthopedics and the other in sports rehabilitation. His research focus investigates the application of shear wave elastography to quantify changes of muscle and tendon following injury and rehabilitation.

"I've always been really eager to learn," Kempfert said, "and I try to take any opportunity to learn from everyone I'm around and that's what's always

led me to pursuing more training and education."

After serving as a physical and occupational therapist for more than six years, Kempfert started his academic career at the University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences in St. Augustine, FL where he rose from adjunct professor to associate professor over an 11-year period.



Kempfert, who grew up in the

Milwaukee area, and is an avid soccer player and fan, has two kids, ages 9 and 7. He enjoys spending time with his family including watching his oldest play on a competitive travel soccer team and his youngest in tennis.

"It's been really fun to live through their eyes at such a young age and just see them each grow individually," Kempfert said.

Whether cultivating his children's passions or sharing his love for rehabilitation with students, Kempfert loves opportunities to invest in younger generations.

"My greatest passion professionally is motivating students, whether that be teaching or research," he said. "I love working with people and the excitement that comes with new learning opportunities."

ALUMNI PROFILES

Emory DPT Alumni Shine in Professional Sports

NBA's Vanessa Brooks: 2016 Emory Grad Becomes League's First Black Female PT/Athletic Trainer

2016 Emory Division of Physical Therapy graduate Vanessa Brooks, DPT, SCS, ATC, CSCS, NREMT, will forever hold the distinction of being the first Black female physical therapist/athletic trainer in the NBA's 78-year history.

That probably would have never happened if not for a suggestion by Brooks' mother who, during the later days in Brooks' undergraduate program at the University of Georgia, told her daughter, "You need to go to physical therapy school."

Brooks, who wasn't sure about the idea, replied, "You know what Mom? I 'm going to apply to one school and if I get in, it is meant to be, and I'll go."

Brooks applied to Emory and because she was so busy serving clinical hours as an athletic training major, she forgot about it and neglected to check her email. When her mom asked her if she had heard from Emory, Brooks checked her account.

"I go to my email account and start scrolling and come across an email from Emory that says, 'Congratulations,'" Brooks recalled. "It says that my deposit was due and the due date was the same exact date I checked my email. I was freaking out because I was in Athens and hadn't paid the deposit."

Brooks' mother and grandmother rushed to Athens, picked Vanessa up and drove her to Emory and paid the deposit just in time.

"I'll never forget meeting the front desk staff, Ms. Ella Pollard and Ms. Monica George-Komi, and thinking, 'Oh my gosh, don't ever let that happen again!' But that's how it all started," Brooks said.

In July, after five seasons with the Oklahoma City Thunder, Brooks made the difficult decision to resign as the Thunder's physical therapist/athletic trainer. In late September, she flew to California and signed a contract to be the Los Angeles Lakers' head athletic trainer and senior physical therapist continuing her career in the NBA where she served in two NBA All-Star games, was one of only two certified athletic trainers to serve on the NBA's Emergency Preparedness Committee and was voted to the National Basketball Athletic Trainers Association Foundation Board.

Not bad for a woman who, while serving her sports residency at Duke University seven years ago, was hesitant to share her career goal of serving in the NBA because the odds of a Black female serving in an NBA training room were so small. In fact, one of her mentors tried to convince her that the NCAA, not the NBA, was a far more reasonable goal.

That all changed at Duke. While sitting in a hair salon, Brooks noticed a private message she received on her LinkedIn account. It was from Donnie Strack, the Thunder's vice president of human and player performance. In the message, Strack complimented Brooks on her impressive educational track record listed on LinkedIn, asked her if she would ever be interested in working in the NBA and provided his cell number for her to reach out to him. Brooks immediately thought it was a scam.

"I was disgusted," she admitted. "I expected this from other social media platforms but not LinkedIn."

She called her husband and he convinced her to look up Strack online. Much to her surprise, everything Strack shared checked out.

"I got out of the chair in the middle of my hair appointment, walked outside



and called," Brooks said. "It was a real person and it was the VP of medical services at the Thunder. I was like, 'Oh my gosh. This is not true. There's no way.""

Unbeknownst to Brooks, Strack had already contacted her mentors and the program director at Duke. Brooks and Strack remained in touch throughout her one-year residency and her follow-up one-year Sports Physical Therapy Fellowship at Wake Forest University.

Immediately after Wake Forest, which she credits for giving her multiple hours of training room experience as well as the opportunity to work with the head athletic trainer and other health care professionals, the Thunder offered her a job in June 2019. Her dream had come true.

For the next five years, Brooks lived the NBA life, which features an 82-game schedule — some of which are back-to-back in different cities — 16-hour workdays on game days and being on 24-hour call to the five or six players on the roster who she has been assigned to.

A typical game day on the road consists of player treatment sessions at a makeshift training room in a hotel ballroom between 8-8:30 a.m. and then player film reviews and a shootaround at a gym. While most players like to take a nap after shootaround in the early afternoon, Brooks will usually have at least one player who needs additional treatment. If not, she'll have about two hours to herself to catch up on notes, eat lunch or do a gym workout for herself.

The team will arrive to the arena about three hours before game time where the training room is set up and more player treatment is given. After the players lift in the weight room and participate in a team shoot-around and meeting with coaches, Brooks applies tape to fingers and ankles about 50 minutes before game time.

Away from the arena, she hosts a YouTube channel where she chronicles her life in the NBA, encourages viewers to invest in their physical and mental health, and offers advice to women and minorities who want to break into professional sports.

"I know when I talk to students of all ethnicities, when they see that you're the first, they know that you had to go through something," Brooks said.

Brooks credits her time at Emory for not only preparing her to care for and rehabilitate professional athletes — some of whom make more than \$40 million a year — but the relationships that she still enjoys today nearly 10 years after graduation.

She still keeps in touch with some faculty and class members and regularly meets physicians and other caregivers throughout the NBA with Emory connections. A few years ago, on a road trip to Memphis, she reunited with her 2016 Emory DPT classmate, Eric Oetter, the director of sports medicine with the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies.

"It was so awesome to see a classmate in the same realm and say, 'Look at what being at Emory can do,'" Brooks said. **EPT**



Carolina Panthers' Corey Rodrigo: Player Relationships, Redemption Stories Make Long Hours Worthwhile

In its 2021 issue, *Emory Physical Therapy* profiled third-year Emory Doctor of Physical Therapy dual degree student Corey Rodrigo, DPT, MBA, ATC and his classmate, Eric Holshouser, PT, DPT, MBA, for their innovative machine learning study that used years of NFL player injury data to predict future injuries.

Three years later, Rodrigo's passion for injury prevention in the NFL is being fulfilled not behind a computer, but as a physical therapist/athletic trainer for the Carolina Panthers, a job he started two weeks after graduating from Emory in 2022.

A week before graduation, Rodrigo received a call from Kevin King, the head athletic trainer of the Panthers and Rodrigo's former clinical instructor in athletic training in his undergrad program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Rodrigo, who had already served as a seasonal intern for 15 months for the Jacksonville Jaguars during the 2017-18 season, attributes getting the NFL gig to some friends at UNC and the Jaguars as well as "a lot of good timing and luck."

During the NFL season, which starts with training camp in late July and ends with the Super Bowl in February, Rodrigo pays what he calls "the pro sports price" by working seven days a week — most of them 10- to 12-hour workdays — while getting just two days off during the team's bye week. Despite that, the chance to build relationships with the players and be part of their successful injury recovery process makes it all worth it says Rodrigo.

"You're there with them through some really hard times when they may be questioning their careers or if they'll play football again with the impact that their injuries may have on their abilities," Rodrigo explained. "And then you get to see all their hard work redeemed. You get to see the personal journey that they've gone on and the strength that they've gained. That type of stuff is really cool to see when guys go back on the field and continue to do something they love."

Not only is the Panthers' six-person medical staff invested in the players, but it is also passionate about the success of the team in terms of wins and losses, Rodrigo said.

"You definitely carry the wins and losses with you," he said. "Ultimately, we're here to help the team succeed and add value and hopefully, we keep the guys safe or return them from injuries in a way that gives our team an advantage. We're 100 percent invested in the wins and losses, maybe not to the same extent as the players and coaches, but we do care deeply about winning as well."

With Rodrigo's DPT and MBA degrees at Emory and his passion for injury prevention analytics, Panthers' staff lauds Rodrigo as the "Excel guru" and jokes that he is an athletic trainer who is both a PT and an IT. And while he enjoys adding value to the team on the data side, he is thankful how Emory prepared him to be so versatile in his primary role as a PT/athletic trainer.

summer. Photo courtesy of the Carolina

"It was such a well-rounded education in that we got a lot of musculoskeletal and sports-related content," Rodrigo explained, "but I really appreciate the people who taught me neuro and acute care — some of my professors like Dr. Phillips, Dr. Kesar, Dr. Bishop, Dr. Sharp. Those people made a significant impact on my ability to be a sports PT."

As part of his role, Rodrigo has had to respond to serious medical events such as spinal cord injuries, concussions and other neurotrauma.

"There's been times where I've had to accompany players to the hospital and I feel super comfortable in those settings," he said. "The breadth of the Emory education — as much as you don't realize it at the time when all you want to do is work in sports and you don't want to work in a hospital and check vitals or do any of that — those foundational neuro acute care courses really paid dividends for me in managing some things on the field."

While the long in-season hours and being on call for the players around the clock may not be for everyone, for Rodrigo, who played football growing up in California, the opportunity to contribute to the safety of the game motivates him to stay in the NFL for many years to come.

"One of the things that I'd like to be part of my legacy is: Did I make the sport safer? Did I contribute to this being a game that generations of kids get to play?" he said. "For me, I love team sports and would like to stay with this team as long as I can." **EPT**



With her thick Southern accent and "yes, sir" "no, ma'am" politeness, one might think that 2021 Emory Division of Physical Therapy graduate Caroline Williams, DPT, ATC, would be out of place in a gritty NFL market like New England where expectations are high and patience is low. But less than a year after landing the position of assistant athletic trainer/ physical therapist with the New England Patriots, Williams, a native of Stone Mountain, GA, has been embraced by the Boston area and is living a "dream come true."

Her journey to the Patriots, however, was anything but linear. It had been marked by heartbreak, a brief career as a traveling physical therapist that took her to five different states and a whole lot of grit.

In her second year at Emory in 2020, thanks to her connection to friend and fellow Emory DPT grad Corey Rodrigo, Williams was slated to start an orthopedic rotation for the Jacksonville Jaguars, the team that Rodrigo had served as a seasonal athletic training assistant prior to starting at Emory. The rotation was to start March 13, 2020, almost the exact time that the worldwide COVID pandemic began.

"That was the biggest heartbreak," Williams recalled. "I couldn't believe it. I just kept praying the rest of the year that that opportunity wouldn't be wasted."

Determined to get another shot at the NFL, Williams admits to "badgering" the Jaguars just enough to get another opportunity after graduating from Emory, this time, a summer internship with the team's athletic training staff during its 2021 training camp. The Florida summer heat was brutal, the hours were long and Williams loved it.

"It was so much fun," she said. "There's never a dull moment."

Since the Jaguars had no openings on their staff after her internship, Williams joined Upstream Rehabilitation as a traveling physical therapist moving to different locations every three months. Her first rotation was in Statesboro, GA, only a two-and-a-half-hour drive to Jacksonville, where she drove to Jaguars' home games to serve water to the players.

"It could not have worked out better," Wiliams explained. "So, about every other Sunday, I would just drive down, hang out with the guys and then I would drive back and work with a lot of elderly patients."

After her first rotation in Statesboro, Williams was certain of one thing: Her heart longed to return to the NFL.

Her travels with Upstream took her to four other states — Tennessee, Missouri, Pennsylvania and South Carolina. In each of those stops, she remained in constant

communication with the Jaguars and applied to three or four other NFL teams.

Her persistence paid off. In March 2023, the Jaguars brought Williams back as a seasonal athletic training assistant, a one-year role in which she directed the team's athletics training interns. After serving for 12 months throughout the team's 2023 season, her experience as both a summer intern and seasonal assistant put her in better position to land a permanent NFL job. On the recommendation of the Jaguars' head athletic trainer, the Patriots hired Williams in March this year.

With an NFL record 11 Super Bowl appearances and six Super Bowl championships (tied for first with the Pittsburgh Steelers), the Patriots were the perfect landing for Williams.

"It's so exciting because there's such a great heritage here and even my Nana knows who the Patriots are," Williams said. "She doesn't know football, but she knows the Patriots."

Contacted in the middle of training camp when the workday begins at 6:30 a.m. and ends about 8:30 p.m., Williams described a day that begins with player treatment and transitions to team and staff meetings, more player treatment and several hours of on-the-field practice including time on the rehab field for players recovering from injury. After practice, the players receive more treatment and then go into afternoon meetings where medical staff can finally relax and have a meal. After meetings, the medical staff helps with "walkthroughs" — a light practice in which the team's game plan is practiced on the field — and finishes the day with more player treatment.

While Williams admits to sometimes missing days of sleeping in, helping injured players get back on the field makes it all worth it.

"Once I got into the groove of it, I just enjoy it so much and I love the camaraderie with my staff and the players," she said.

Williams credits Emory with preparing her for her NFL journey and noted that she gets more respect and trust from her patients when they learn she came from a prestigious institution like Emory.

She especially loves the fact that she still keeps in touch with some of the Emory faculty — she cited Kathleen Geist, Peter Sprague and Jessica Santucci — who were instrumental in both the orthopedic parts of her clinical rotations as well as the didactic parts.

"They're the first people from Emory I emailed when I got the job," she said, "and they were so supportive. They're our cheerleaders as well as our professors."

EPT

DIVISION AWARDS

2024 CLINICAL PARTNER AWARD **Emory Grad Helps** Team Rehab **Triple Number** of Clinical Rotations



In 2018, the Michigan-based Team Rehabilitation Physical Therapy (Team Rehab) opened its first clinic in Georgia. Today, Team Rehab has 26 clinics in Metro Atlanta and thanks to Emory Division of Physical Therapy graduates like P.J. Pruszynski, PT, DPT, Team Rehab hosts about 20 short-term clinical rotations each year for Emory students as well as about 10-12 long-term rotations earning Team Rehab the division's 2024 Outstanding Clinical Partner Award.

Pruszynski, who graduated in 2019, joined Team Rehab after graduation for two years, left to serve in a private practice for a year and then rejoined Team Rehab as its site coordinator for clinical education in 2022. Since then, the number of students that Team Rehab takes for clinical rotations has tripled giving Pruszynski an opportunity to create the same kind of positive clinical experiences that she had while at Emory.

"There's no doubt that many students have those 'aha' moments that a clinical instructor helped create or maybe the instructor did a great job of building confidence in them," Pruszynski, who oversees the logistics of placing all students who do clinicals at Team Rehab, said. "So, once I got out of school, one of my top priorities was to become a clinical instructor because I really hit the jackpot with three incredible long-term clinical instructors I had while at Emory."

While Team Rehab hosts several students from other PT programs, Pruszynski is proud of the fact that Emory students, aside from the impressive competency they bring to patient care, are known throughout Team Rehab for their professionalism from the first day they arrive.

"That really stands out and that's major kudos to the faculty," Pruszynski said. "Emory students prioritize that professional communication between supervisors and between patients and furthermore, I've seen those same students excel in communicating with physician referral sources. That can be a pretty intimidating thing even as a seasoned clinician."

While Pruszynski loves the fact that her current role allows her to maintain relationships with some Emory DPT faculty, she admits that it's still strange being a colleague to her former professors, rather than a student.

"I don't think that deference to my professors will ever change even though we may be serving similar roles," she said. "But there's so much respect for them and I'm very thankful for the opportunities that they helped provide me." EPT

2024 CLINICAL EDUCATOR AWARD

Experienced Instructor Candace James Meets Students 'Where They Are'



Candace James

After 20 years of teaching physical therapy students, Emory Rehabilitation Hospital Student Coordinator Candace James, PT,

DPT, isn't afraid to admit that she doesn't want her students to be just like her.

"Many students I have worked with will say, 'Oh, I just want to be like you," James recalls. "I respond, 'Do not be like me. Be better than me so you can pass the torch to the next aspiring PT. This is how we will improve as a profession."

James, who has served in the neurorehabilitation setting at the Atlanta-based health care system her entire career and instructed dozens of Emory University PT students since 2004, is the 2024 recipient of the Emory Division of Physical Therapy's Outstanding Clinical Educator Award. She attributes her success as an instructor to "meeting students where they are with their clinical and academic skills."

"Whenever I have a student," James said, "I always ask questions such as: How do you like to receive feedback? How do you best learn? Are you a hands-on person? Or are you more of a visual learner? Everyone learns differently.

"If I'm going to be effective and make their time worthwhile while they are in the clinic, I learn how to adapt to their learning styles. Of course, this could be a lot of pivoting but it's necessary to be an effective teacher."

James refuses to cut corners in her instruction because as she reminds her students, they will, one day, be caring for her and her loved ones. That's why she emphasizes that being a physical therapist is more than providing hands-on care, but that compassion, professionalism and best practice are all integral to an optimal patient experience.

While nearly all of her students have been "born into technology," James says she still requires her students to hand-write SOAP (Subjective, Objective, Assessment and Plan) notes while documenting.

"No matter where they end up in their health care careers, if the power goes out, they're still going to have to write a SOAP note on paper," she said.

James, who instructs two Emory DPT students a year, loves it when students, many of whom have targeted orthopedics as their career focus, leave with a newfound love for the inpatient neuro setting.

"I love the setting that I'm in," James said. "You are in a constant state of learning which can be challenging yet gratifying." **EPT**

Class of 2024 Student Awards

Each year the Division of Physical Therapy presents awards to graduating students

Director's Award for Academic Excellence | This award was given to Cayla Bodner, Analee Carpenter, Melissa Goldstein and Joyce Hsu in recognition of exceptional academic work.

Director's Award for Excellence in Growth Mindset | This award acknowledged Morgan Levy and Femi Makinde for modeling perseverance and courage in meeting challenges and who, through hard work and dedication, demonstrate resilience and a love of learning.

Distinction in Justice, Equity, Diversion and Inclusion (JEDI) | This award was given to Taylor Brown, Analee Carpenter, Maya McIntyre and Aaron Wang.

Excellence in Service Award | This award acknowledged Danielle Audain, Deondria Hawkins, Anne Holland Lane and Alexandria Spencer for outstanding service contributions to the program and/or physical therapy's professional association.

Frances A. Curtiss Award for Excellence in Community Service

This award recognized the outstanding service contributions of Spencer Dyke, Kendra Jones and Maya McIntyre to the community at the local, national or international level.

Ian H. Tovin Scholarship Award | This award was given to Aaron Wang in recognition of outstanding performance throughout the program and an intention to focus on orthopedics after graduation.

Johnnie Morgan Award for Excellence in Clinical Science | This award was given to Georgina Gabbidon, Maya McIntyre and Elizabeth Meretighan for going above and beyond what is expected of students during their clinical affiliations.

Pamela A. Catlin Award for Excellence in Critical Inquiry

This award was given to Kendra Jones, Amirah Louketis, Gaetan Munter, Marin Plemmons and Alex Poorman who were deemed by the faculty and their research advisers to have shown leadership, mastery of content knowledge, problem-solving ability, enthusiasm, and value to overall research projects.

Susan J. Herdman Award for Excellence in Clinical Practice

This award was given to Julia Betchart, Maya McIntyre, Emmanuel Noel, Matt Rowan and Grant Sadler for exemplifying the drive to advance the profession and who demonstrated knowledge and skills in a specialized area of patient care.

Zoher F. Kapasi Award for Excellence in Leadership | This award was given to Danielle Audain, Deondria Hawkins and Gaetan Munter for showing considerable initiative and organizational skills related to class and program activities.











































Matt Rowan



Grant Sadler



Alexandria Spencer



2024 ALUMNI NOTES

Natalia Busuttil, 19DPT, currently works both as an oncology nurse and as an acute care physical therapist. Her ultimate goal is to combine her knowledge and be a nurse practitioner and a PT in orthopedics to improve the quality of life for her patients.

Alyssa Collier Dobiyanski, 18DPT, graduated in May with academic honors and distinction with a master's in health systems administration (MHSA) at Georgetown University. She recently accepted a one-year fellowship as an executive resident in hospital administration in Tampa, FL with HCA Healthcare. Prior to that, she served for six years at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C., starting as an acute care physical therapist clinician I and then eventually being promoted to clinician III where she served as a clinical instructor to three DPT students.



She attended evening classes for her master's while working full time at the hospital.



Lance Frank, DPT17, was recently featured on "The Drew Barrymore Show" to talk about men's pelvic health. Frank is the owner of Flex Physical Therapy which provides pelvic health and orthopedic physical therapy in Midtown Atlanta. He also led a standing room only lecture at the 2024 American Physical Therapy Association's Combined Sections Meeting.

Courtney Beshel Johnson, 17DPT, and her husband, Tyler, celebrated the birth of their second

daughter, Sadie, who was born in April. She continues to work part time at HPRC Pediatric Rehab in Columbus, GA.



Michael Robinson, 13DPT, was recently published in the Rehabilitation Oncology Journal with a manuscript titled, "Melanoma and People of Color: The Role of Physical Therapists." In his submission, Robinson says that while the incidence of melanoma is low for people of color, when it is diagnosed, it is often in the later stages resulting in the likelihood of death. With this in

mind, Robinson encourages physical therapists to screen for melanoma when

treating people of color. In his submission, Robinson thanks Emory Division

of Physical Therapy Professor Sara Pullen, DPT, MPH, CHES, for her inspiration and assistance with the manuscript.

Jenny Brickman Terry, 15DPT, moved to Colorado Springs, CO after graduating from Emory and worked in the acute care setting as a physical therapist until 2019. Since then, she has worked in administrative roles, including admission liaison and PPS coordinator, for the inpatient rehab unit. She recently obtained her certification in Healthcare Compliance. She and her husband, Michael, welcomed their daughter, Leila, in April 2023.



In Memory

REMEMBERING FORMER LONG-TIME EMORY DPT FACULTY MEMBER BRENDA GREENE

The Emory Division of Physical Therapy fondly remembers long-time faculty member Dr. Brenda Greene who recently passed away in Atlanta after a courageous battle with Parkinson's disease. Greene served as an assistant professor of rehabilitation medicine at Emory University, where she began teaching in 1988. She also served as the associate director of the physical therapy program. As one of the first nationally certified orthopedic physical therapy clinical specialists, she made significant contributions to her field. As a long-time faculty member in the Division of Physical Therapy, she significantly influenced the musculoskeletal curriculum through active learning strategies and health and wellness models. Greene was a cherished educator, mentor and colleague, and will be deeply missed. Beyond her professional accomplishments, she took pride in adopting dogs and tending to her flower garden.

Emory Grad, Sport Rehab Center Founder Gives Back to Emory DPT



Brian Tovin

As an Emory graduate and founder of one of Atlanta's longest running, private sports physical therapy practices, Brian Tovin, PT, DPT, MMSC, SCS, ATC, FAAOMPT, is passionate about giving back to the profession and school that have enriched his life so much.

That's why, several years ago, he created an annual scholarship, the Ian H. Tovin Award, in honor of his late father that supports an exceptional student(s) in the Emory DPT program whose focus is on musculoskeletal rehabilitation. The Tovin Award is one of several funds that have been established to support the Emory Division of Physical Therapy in its mission to support existing students and strengthen the division's groundbreaking research efforts.

"My father was a dry cleaner and when he was looking at different careers and the aptitudes of his three sons in the early 1980s," Tovin explained, "he realized the potential of the growing field of physical therapy. My two brothers and I all went into physical therapy."

After high school, Tovin attended Boston University as a premed student and a collegiate swimmer. After a series of injuries that exposed him firsthand to sports rehabilitation, he switched to physical therapy and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in PT in 1988. He later earned a Master of Medical Science Degree in orthopedic physical therapy from Emory in 1992 and then his Doctor of Physical Therapy from Emory in 2002.

Today, Tovin's Sports Rehabilitation Center has three locations in Atlanta and next year, will celebrate its 30th anniversary as one of the city's leading orthopedic and sports rehabilitation clinics.

"Emory is a big part of my foundation as well as the reputation that Sports Rehab Center has gained in Atlanta," Tovin said. "I always believed in giving back and I felt that Emory was the best target from a philanthropical standpoint."

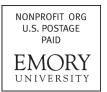
Tovin hopes that more people who have benefitted from the physical therapy field — either as an Emory alum or as a patient — will help grow the Ian H. Tovin endowment and open the doors for more young people to enter the profession.

"Look at large universities and, for example, their athletic programs," Tovin said. "People don't hesitate to write checks to support athletic programs because they are fans of the programs. We should be a fan of our profession."

To support the Ian H. Tovin Award as well as other funds designed to support the Emory Division of Physical Therapy, please visit the division's website and click "Support Emory DPT."



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Congratulations Class of 2024

