

Dr. Uwe Pontius Recognized with Outstanding Service Award, Adjunct Position

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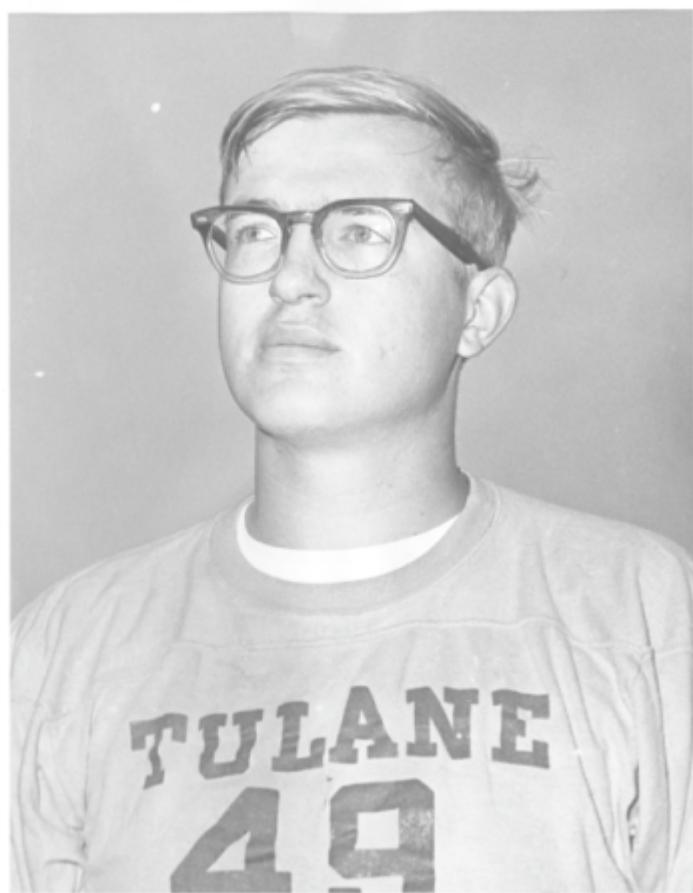
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Left to right: Joyous (Joy) Van Buskirk; William C. Van Buskirk, PhD; Uwe Pontius, MD, PhD; and Candace Andrews. Photo by Matthew Hinton.



Uwe Pontius, MD, PhD (Tulane BME) receives the 2023 Outstanding Service Alumnus Award. Photo by Matthew Hinton.



Dr. Uwe Pontius in his Tulane football jersey

Our newest adjunct faculty member, Dr. Uwe Pontius, MD, PhD, was recently recognized with the Tulane School of Science and Engineering 2023 Outstanding Service Alumnus Award. His innovative work with graduate and undergraduate students in the biomedical engineering program has led to published articles, several master's theses, patents, and a Kenneth H. Kuhn Sr. Memorial Award-winning senior capstone design project. His support of initiatives such as Biomedical Innovation for Global Impact (BIG Impact) and the Center for Anatomical and Movement Sciences (CAMS) has made possible numerous student opportunities for hands-on experiential learning. He also co-taught Biomedical Orthopedics with his longtime friend and collaborator Dr. Ron Anderson. All faculty and students working with Dr. Pontius appreciate his patient instruction on industry surgery standards and his contagious positive spirit.

Here we share more on “Dr. P.’s” remarkable life and medical journey.

Uwe R. Pontius was born to Inge Lemke Just on May 15, 1945, at the German Army Field Hospital in Prakatiz, Czechoslovakia. His birth was one week after the declaration of WWII peace in Europe. His mother served as a practical nurse at the German hospital. Within a week the hospital was overrun by units of the Big Red One American Army division. Soon the American division was informed they were being withdrawn from Czechoslovakia so that the Soviets could take over that country. The American unit put Inge and her infant son Uwe on a train to southern Germany to save both of their lives.

In 1951, Uwe and his mother immigrated through Ellis Island to Medford, Oklahoma. Since his future stepfather, an American soldier named Elmer Pontius, was still serving in Germany, they could not immigrate until his stepfather got his brother and the Medford County district attorney to sign agreements to support Uwe and his mother until she died and Uwe reached the age of majority. His stepfather adopted Uwe, and he became a U.S. citizen at age 14.

In 1963, at the age of 18, Uwe matriculated at Tulane University where he began to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering. As a freshman on academic scholarship, he worked at the Department of Orthopedic Surgery doing data reduction on animal whiplash experiments under the direction of Dr. Jack Wickstrom. The engineering school ran the mechanical aspects of the study while the orthopedic department provided the medical expertise.

From 1965 to 1967, Uwe was the walk-on field goal kicker for the Green Wave after Tulane coaches noticed his talent kicking for both sides during an intramural tackle football game. While at Tulane, Uwe met his future wife, Marky Read, a French major at Newcomb College. They were introduced by Uwe's teammate Jim Jancik, the starting safety for the Green Wave.

Uwe was awarded his Bachelor of Science degree in 1968, taking advantage of his extra year of eligibility to kick for Tulane in 1967.

Immediately he began to work toward a Master of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering at Tulane. Because he felt a close relationship with medicine as well as engineering he proceeded to blend a PhD in Bioengineering with entering medical school, ultimately to combine the two disciplines.

He began research projects under advisors Y. King Liu and William C. Van Buskirk, the soon-to-be founder of the Department of Biomedical Engineering and future Dean of the School.

Uwe completed the degree requirements for his Master's degree in 1971. Within a month of earning his Master's degree, Uwe married Marky, a marriage of 45 years longevity. He began work on his Doctor of Philosophy in Mechanical Engineering. His dissertation "The Effects of the Cervical Neuromusculature on the Dynamics of Whiplash" completed the work he began in 1963 when he first arrived at Tulane as a freshman.

Uwe began medical school at Tulane three years prior to completing his PhD, which was awarded in 1975. Just six months later, he was awarded his Doctor of Medicine degree as well as the Gold Scalpel Award by the Department of Surgery.

Uwe interned at Charity Hospital of Louisiana in General Surgery, then completed an Orthopedic Surgery Residency at the U.S. Air Force Medical Center, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

He spent the next two years as an attending surgeon at Sheppard Regional U.S. Air Force Hospital, Wichita Falls, Texas, including a year in service as Chief of Surgical Services for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal by the Air Force.

Uwe was honorably discharged from the U.S. Air Force in 1983 with the rank of Major.

He became Board Certified in Orthopedic Surgery in 1984, and entered private practice in San Antonio, Texas, for the next 35 years.

As a widower, Uwe married Candace Andrews Pontius, a native Texan and long-time friend of his and Marky's, in 2018.

At the behest of his long-ago advisor, Dean Van Buskirk, Uwe began a collaboration with the Department of Biomedical Engineering in 2020 to develop an innovative implant to treat knee arthritis in a difficult patient population. It was a population he knew well from his decades of private practice. He developed and received several patents for this knee implant device.

Through Uwe's generosity of time and resource, this collaboration has been more than fruitful. He has involved 16 undergraduates, master's candidates, and alumni directly, and supported department efforts in many other ways. He has given a number of lectures reliant on his clinical experience, and is active on master's theses committees, including serving as co-director of a master candidate student.

In 2022, Uwe was appointed to the Adjunct Faculty of the Department of Biomedical Engineering. It has been a gratifying experience for him to return to his alma mater, where his Tulane education shaped a rewarding career and life.

Dr. Pontius has retired from private practice. The academic turn of his career, though, has postponed a second retirement -- from a field he enjoyed from the moment he stepped onto the Tulane campus as a teenager from Oklahoma. He likes to say that the karmic wheel has come full circle in his life.