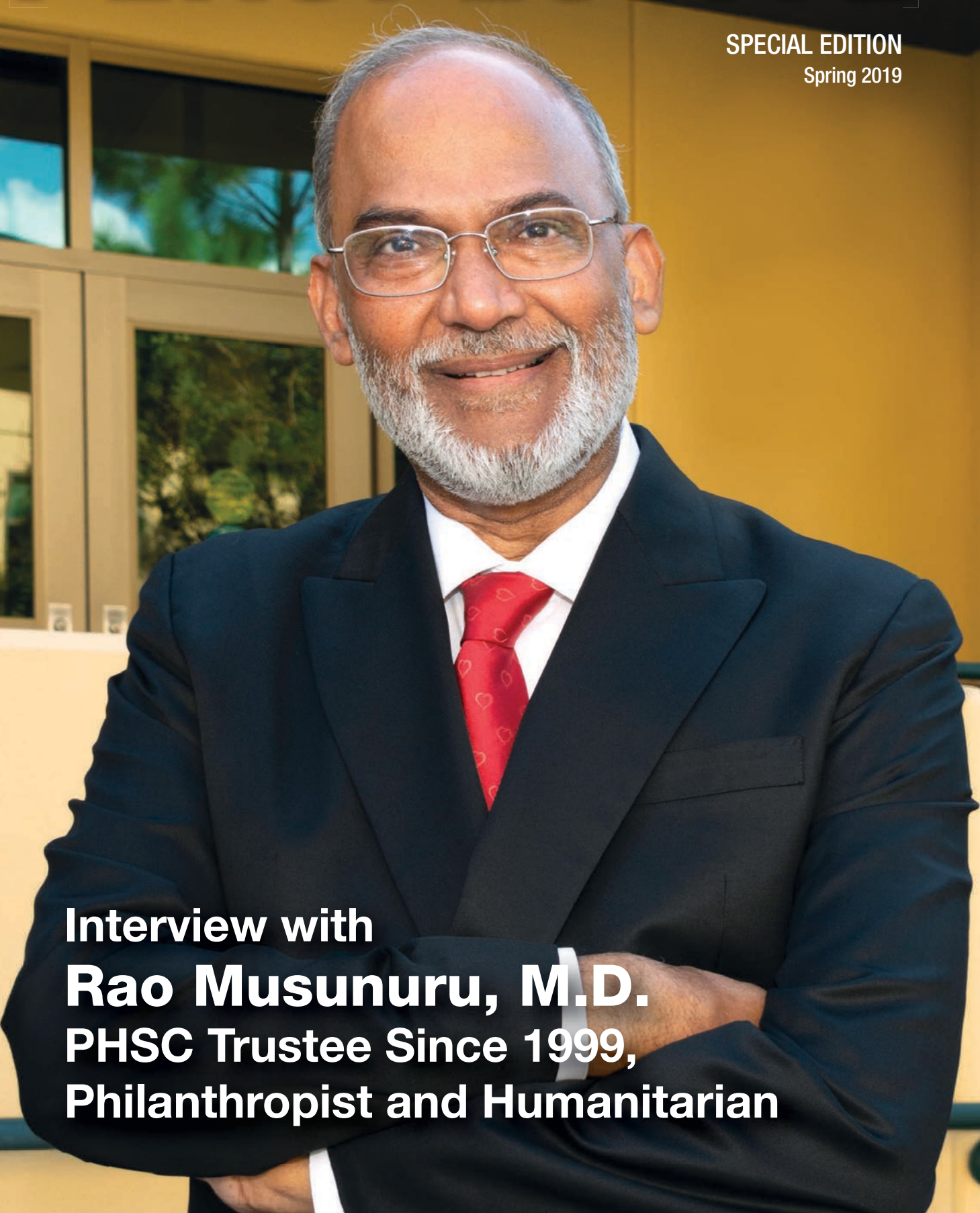


PERSPECTIVE

PASCO-HERNANDO STATE COLLEGE

SPECIAL EDITION
Spring 2019

A portrait of Rao Musunuru, M.D., a man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit and a red tie with a heart pattern. He is standing in front of a building with large windows. The text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

**Interview with
Rao Musunuru, M.D.
PHSC Trustee Since 1999,
Philanthropist and Humanitarian**

RAO MUSUNURU, M.D. CONFERENCE CENTER



Dr. Musunuru with wife, Prameela, at the Rao Musunuru, M.D. Conference Center Dedication Ceremony, September 25, 2018.

Q&A

WITH DR. MUSUNURU

Interview with Rao Musunuru, M.D., on the occasion of an unprecedented 20 years of service as a member of Pasco-Hernando State College's District Board of Trustees.

By Lucy Miller

Q: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY INFLUENCES?


A: I was born and raised in a small rural farming village in South India, with no electricity; hence, with no amenities. As well-to-do members of the farming community, we lived on the outskirts of the village—what might be considered serene “suburbs” at the time. There was a county (district) with my family name in our state.

My mother and grandmother were my first, very important influences. When I was very young, I believed I had two mothers. I later realized that one was my birth mother; the other, my grandmother. Interestingly, when I called “Mother,” each responded, according to my needs.

Q: YOU OFTEN SPEAK OF YOUR GRANDMOTHER AS BEING SPECIAL. WHY WAS SHE SO INFLUENTIAL?

A: My grandmother was very smart, despite having no formal education with no access to a school or library. Her “internet” consisted of a network of concerned mothers and grandmothers. She was passionate about education, making me walk two miles through the fields each way to attend school in a larger, neighboring village. Frankly, I would have been happy hanging around the farm with my grandfather. Instead, my grandmother woke me up at 4 a.m. daily to study by the light of a kerosene lamp. Our alarm clock was the sound of a train chugging through our village early every morning. My grandmother was wise and worldly. She encouraged me to listen to “The Voice of America” on a transistor radio en route to school, even though Russian influence in India was prevalent at the time. She insisted I receive advanced education after medical school in the United States (but only after getting married).



 *Koteswara Rao Musunuru, with his beloved grandmother. Her enduring guidance influenced the course of his life, through his childhood to the present.*

Q: HOW WAS YOUR CHILDHOOD UNIQUE, COMPARED TO THE TYPICAL AMERICAN EXPERIENCE?

A: Like other happy villagers, four generations lived in the same big, sturdy house. My grandmother was the matriarch. I never heard the word “divorce” until I went to the city at 16, to attend medical school.

Q: WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO LEAVE YOUR LIFE IN INDIA BEHIND?

A: It was difficult. Moving to the U.S. was an enormous sacrifice for my family. I was the only son of my father, who was the only son of my grandmother. My family was acutely aware of all that they would miss after I left, including not being able to enjoy raising my child. That kind of sacrifice can only come from a mother's love.

Q: HOW HAS YOUR VILLAGE CHANGED SINCE YOUR YOUTH?

A: Just as I was leaving for college, electricity arrived, changing everything. My family helped build a telephone exchange, established a library, and supported other causes needed for a modernizing community. Now, every village household has TV and Internet. Cell phones, modern kitchens, mechanized farms, running water, and rapid transit are common and readily available. However, like me, many of the village's children relocated to cities and other countries. The community changed. The elderly learned to live alone. Unfortunately, there is always a price for progress.

Q: HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR WIFE?

A: My would-be wife arrived in this world the same year I was born, in a neighboring village. Her family moved to a nearby town a few years after her birth. Though we did not know each other growing up, we were meant for each other. I attended an all boys college, while she attended a neighboring all girls college in the same town—both strict Christian schools. Then I moved on to medical school. Immediately after I finished medical school, when we were both 21 years old, a family friend arranged a blind date. It was the very first date for both of us. We liked each other, and have been happily married for 44 years. Of course, we argue at times, for silly reasons – often when she does not realize that I am teasing her. My in-laws were very proud and fond of me. Everybody that knows my wife describes her as a saint. My luck truly began when she entered my life.



 *Dr. Musunuru at college graduation, age 16.*



In 1975, Dr. Musunuru receiving a gold medal at his graduation from medical school.

Q: WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME A PHYSICIAN?

A: I didn't, my grandmother did. As customary in our culture, at my birth I was told that my grandmother picked me up and announced that I would become well educated, noble, and rich; and then she named me "Koteswara" (part of my first name, which truly translates to "millionaire"). To fulfill her dream, I would become nothing other than a physician, a healer. She did not get any argument from me. I was my high school's valedictorian and attended a famous Catholic all boys college, enabling me to enter the most respected medical school. When I graduated medical school at age 21, I earned a gold medal (real gold). My grandmother decided that I should study in the United States for advanced clinical training, even though I would have earned more money and enjoyed a more luxurious life locally.



Q: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EARLY EXPERIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES?

A: I legally emigrated to the United States in 1976 with my pregnant wife, \$250 and two suitcases full of personal belongings. My salary was \$500 per month with health insurance, increased to \$14,500 annually after six months. I received post-graduate medical training in New York City for five years. My brother-in-law, who also trained at the same hospital, became my mentor. I chose cardiology because this specialty is truly at the heart of medicine.



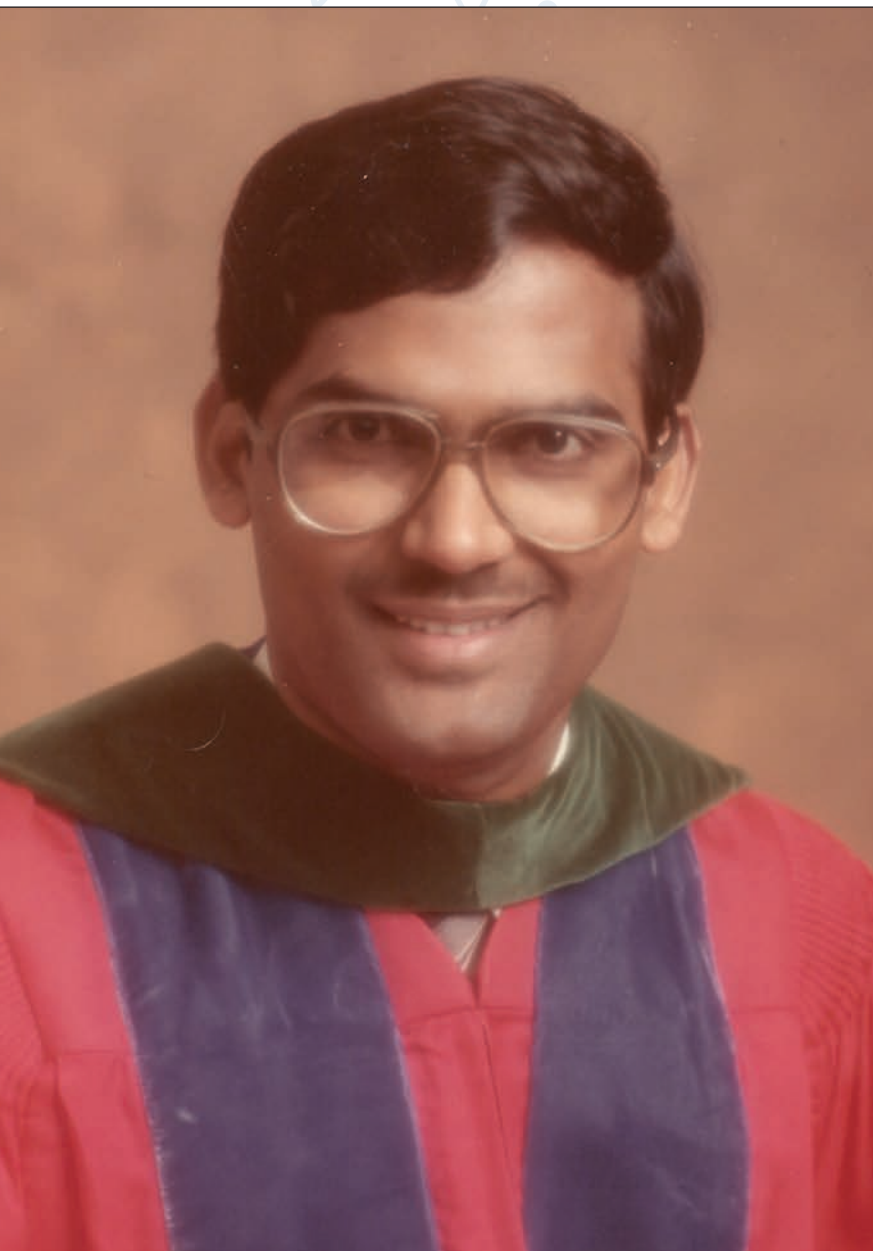
A captured tender moment, Dr. Musunuru and Kiran, 1979.



The young doctor, wife Prameela, and Kiran, age eight months.


Q: WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO PASCO COUNTY, FLORIDA?

A: The weather...and destiny. I relocated in 1981 without knowing a single person in Pasco or Hernando counties.



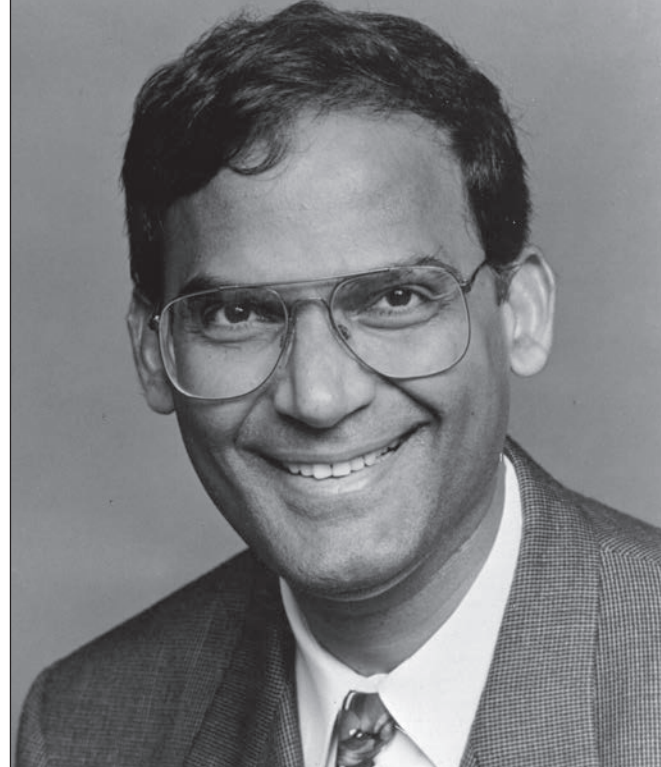
Q: WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN LIKE IN THE COMMUNITY?


A: My success, in part, is owed to the first administrator of a newly built 50 bed rural hospital in Hudson, now Regional Medical Center Bayonet Point. The first day I walked into the hospital with full cardiology credentials and privileges, the administrator informed me that foreign physician specialists were not needed. They wanted to build a reputable hospital with “good old boys,” and I could leave town. I accepted this as a challenge and stayed. The rest is history. I became instrumental in building a nationally acclaimed heart institute in Hudson, recognized as among the top 50 U.S. hospitals for cardiology and cardiac surgery by U.S. News and World Report. I also built a premier “continuing medical education program.” During this time, the same administrator who had told me to leave town had a severe heart attack with cardiogenic shock. I was able to save his life. A few years later, I became chairman of the hospital board, a volunteer job.

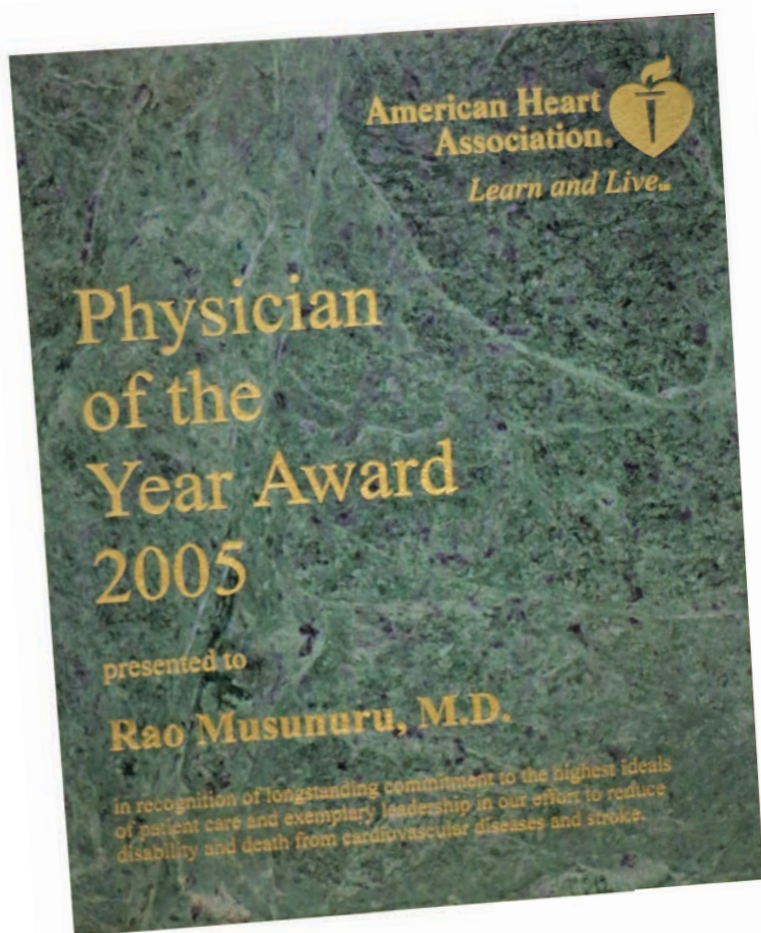
 *Dr. Musunuru at an American College of Cardiology fellowship reception in 1981, right after establishing his practice in Hudson, Florida.*

Q: YOU HAVE RECEIVED MUCH RECOGNITION OVER THE YEARS. ARE THESE TRIBUTES MEANINGFUL TO YOU?

A: The community has been very good to me for the past 38 years. I have received many local and state awards, accolades, and honors, paralleling my national recognitions in cardiology. A few honors that I received had never existed in the history of Pasco County. I am grateful for the recognitions. I worked very hard to build my private practice, but never expected or accepted a penny from the hospital.



 *President, American Heart Association, Florida Affiliate, 2003.*



Q: WHAT AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS ARE AMONG THE MOST MEANINGFUL TO YOU?

A: The "National Physician of the Year Award" from the American Heart Association in 2005, in addition to the other awards from AHA. I am the only cardiologist that ever received all three of the most prestigious national awards from the AHA. I also really appreciated the Proclamation by the Pasco County Commission recognizing February 1, the first day of "Heart Month," as "Dr. Rao Musunuru Day" in perpetuity—the first of its kind in the history of Pasco County.

Q: WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEANINGFUL PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT?

A: My son, Kiran. And I can claim only half of the credit. He is a true gentleman and a genius with a brilliant mind and a beautiful heart. He has received many national recognitions by age 42, including recognition at the White House. He is also a cardiologist, pursuing leading edge genetic research to discover novel ways of treating and preventing diseases, including working on a vaccine for heart disease—the number one, worldwide killer of humans. His mentors tell me that he is Nobel Prize material, and I know he will make Pasco proud.

Q: DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?

A: Yes. Faith is very important for a peaceful life.

Q: YOU ARE A FREQUENT COLUMNIST IN THE TAMPA BAY TIMES AND ENJOY WRITING. HOW DID YOU FIND TIME TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL WRITING SKILLS?

A: Like learning, writing came naturally to me. My poetry was published when I was in college and medical school. English is my third language, but adapting to languages also came to me naturally.

Q: YOU HAVE SERVED AS A PHSC TRUSTEE SINCE 1999, RECEIVING A NATIONAL AWARD FOR YOUR INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP. YOU ARE ALSO A GENEROUS PHSC FOUNDATION DONOR. WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION TO SERVE?

A: Just like my grandmother, I believe in higher education. Without it, I would not be what I am today, and nobody would be reading this interview. The future of any country depends on the education of its youth. My interest in serving and supporting higher education and worthwhile causes is partly selfish. Happiness in helping others is addictive. Recognition is last on the list.



Prestigious award from the Association of Community College Trustees in 2013, recognizing Dr. Musunuru for exemplary leadership.

Q: WHAT IS YOUR PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNITY SERVICE AND GIVING?

A: Most individuals dedicated to community service and philanthropy are motivated by making a positive difference in their communities. I do not believe that most people are motivated by an interest in recognition. Even if some are, their efforts are still noble and helpful. Donating time and funds may earn recognition, but it is very fleeting and may even elicit jealousy. I also believe acts of generosity and service inspire others to do the same. The PHSC Foundation goes to great lengths to express appreciation to donors and contributors at every level. Philanthropists and supporters should be appreciated while still alive, rather than in speeches at funerals.

Q: WHAT OTHER FIELDS INTEREST YOU? AND HAVE YOU CONSIDERED RETIREMENT?

A: Many people have encouraged me to enter politics. My wife said “no,” so that was that. However, over the past few decades, I have convinced legislators to introduce and pass socially relevant health related bills and lobbied for support for public education. Retirement? Work is good for body and mind. Of course, the final decision will be made with my wife, depending on our health as we age.



Bash at the Ranch event, 2013, sponsored by the Musunuru Family. Prameela, Dr. Musunuru, and former PHSC President Katherine M. Johnson greet the late Don Porter, representing the family that provided the land for the Porter Campus at Wiregrass Ranch in Wesley Chapel.

Q: IN ADDITION TO MANY OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, YOU ARE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO THE WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY. WHY IS HISTORY IMPORTANT TO YOU?

A: We have to understand our past, and learn from it, to be able to build a better future. It is very humbling to discover all of the accomplishments of our ancestors.

Q: WHAT ARE AMONG YOUR MOST PRECIOUS ASSETS, AND WHAT IS THE BEST GIFT ONE CAN OFFER?

A: Everyone's most important assets are good friends, followed by good family. Definitely not money, even though it helps. The best gift one can give—good memories.

Q: WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE YOU CAN OFFER? AND WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS?

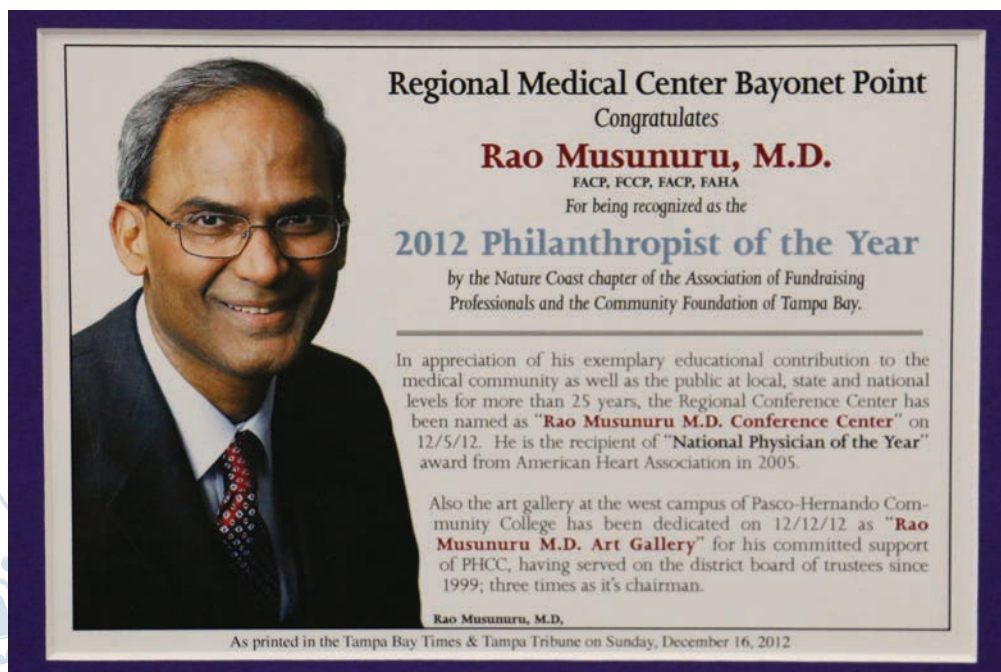
A: Be content and happy. Happiness is a state of mind. Henry David Thoreau said, "Happiness is like a butterfly: The more you chase it, the more it will elude you. But, if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder." Commitment, courage, and knowledge are attributes that fuel success, along with demonstrating maturity and the ability to appreciate others.

Q: WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED FOR?

A: Helping others, especially people in the most need, both personally and professionally. I am indebted to everybody who helped me in any way to help others. First in line is God!

Q: ANY FINAL COMMENT?

A: I hope my mother and grandmother approve of what I did with my life, and more importantly, how much I try to improve the lives of others in the community that I call home. I sincerely hope that their sacrifice helped some people that they would never meet in a distant land, in some small way.



RESOLUTION OF RECOGNITION

Rao Musunuru, M.D.

Outgoing Chair District Board of Trustees

July 17, 2018

A Resolution by the Pasco-Hernando State College District Board of Trustees, at its regular board meeting with unanimous consent, on July 17, 2018, designating the conference center on the Spring Hill Campus as “Rao Musunuru, M.D. Conference Center;” and

WHEREAS, Dr. Rao Musunuru has been continuously serving as a member of the PHSC District Board of Trustees since 1999, appointed by several governors of the great State of Florida; and

WHEREAS, he served effectively as Chair of the District Board of Trustees four times during this period; and

WHEREAS, he is the longest serving member of the District Board of Trustees in College history and is among the longest serving Trustees in the Florida College System; and

WHEREAS, he has been instrumental in the development of the Spring Hill Campus, starting from the site selection in 2000 to its opening in 2010; and

WHEREAS, he has received national recognition from the Association of Community College Trustees with the Southern Regional Trustee Leadership Award in 2013 for his innovative work in several areas of PHSC; and

WHEREAS, he has personally given, and also has secured, millions of dollars over the years for the PHSC Foundation to support student scholarships; and

WHEREAS, he has been respected and appreciated by many members of the PHSC District Board of Trustees over the years for his support, education and guidance; and

WHEREAS, he has been recognized and honored by numerous prestigious national, state and local organizations and institutions for his exemplary medical, scientific, humanitarian, advocacy, educational and philanthropic contributions for the past three and a half decades; and

WHEREAS, he has supported and advanced the College’s recruitment, retention and graduation efforts by various means including his popular guest columns in the Tampa Bay Times (formerly St. Petersburg Times) and the Tampa Tribune.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by this Board that the Spring Hill Campus conference center be named “Rao Musunuru, M.D. Conference Center” and, with our sincere appreciation for his dedication and commitment to higher education, the Board wishes that he continue to serve on the District Board of Trustees for many years to come for the continued benefit of PHSC, its faculty, staff and students.

**DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF
PASCO-HERNANDO STATE COLLEGE**

PASCO-HERNANDO STATE COLLEGE
RAO MUSUNURU, M.D. ART GALLERY
2019 EXHIBIT SCHEDULE

LIFE'S TREASURES

ARTIST: ELAINE HAHN, PAINTER

February 27–April 10

Opening Reception

Feb. 27 • 11 a.m.–1 p.m.

Sponsored by PHSC Student Government Association

Award winning artist Elaine Hahn specializes in capturing early morning and afternoon light, enhancing colors to produce unique and interesting reflections and shadows in her work. Images of the beautiful coastal and marine subjects found on the Gulf of Mexico in Florida are her focus.



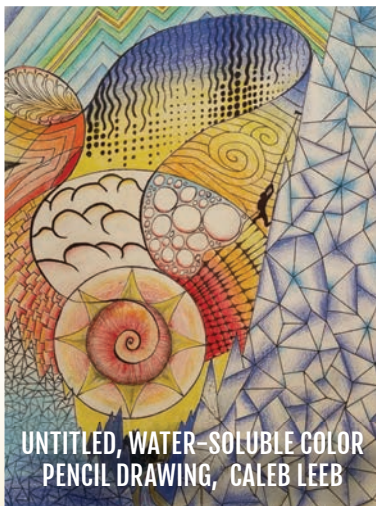
PHSC STUDENTS OF THE ARTS

April 17–May 15

Opening Reception

April 17 • 11 a.m.–1 p.m.

Sponsored by PHSC Student Government Association



10TH ANNUAL PHSC FACULTY AND STAFF SUMMER ART SHOW

May 22–July 31

Opening Reception

May 22 • 4–6 p.m.

Sponsored by PHSC Chapter of the Association of Florida Colleges



The gallery is closed during the College's winter and spring breaks, Fridays in summer, most weekends and national holidays. For more details or to request school, organization or private tours of the gallery, contact 727.816.3231.

All exhibits are FREE and open to the public.

Visit phsc.edu/student-life/rao-musunuru-md-art-gallery for full schedule.

GALLERY HOURS

M-TH: 9 a.m.–7 p.m. | F: 9 a.m.–3:30 p.m.

PHSC West Campus

10230 Ridge Road | New Port Richey