



## Dr. Monte just an ordinary guy



Dr. Ralph Monteagudo is just a regular guy. Although he enjoys being a physician, it's not who he is. At heart, he's the water boy.

"It's true," he laughs. "I was the water boy for the Lake Roosevelt High School football team." And this wasn't while he was in high school, but just a few short years ago.

"Being the water boy isn't beneath anyone and certainly not beneath me," he smiles. Helping out on the sidelines as the team physician, Dr. Monte noticed the players weren't getting their water. He picked up the bottles and did the job. "They needed it. I did it. I got over my God complex a long time ago."

In fact, Dr. Monte began his medical career at the bottom of the ladder. "I was an orderly at St. Petersburg Osteopathic Hospital," he recalls of the job his father, a physician who emigrated from Cuba before Castro took over, suggested he try. "I really enjoyed it. Back in those days they trained you on the job and we did lots of things they only let nurses do now like put in catheters."

Finding he had an aptitude for medicine and a genuine heart for people, he worked as an orderly and aide from age 15 throughout his college career. He graduated from the University of South Florida in Tampa with a degree in natural science, then attended medical school at the College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery in Des Moines, Iowa.

"I grew up knowing Osteopaths and the focus of the school was on rural medicine and building relationships with your patients — understanding them and what's important to them," he says. "I knew it was for me."

A man who enjoys people, Dr. Monte practiced in Iowa for six years, then moved west to Grand Coulee where the local hospital was in dire need of physicians. Busy from the day he walked in the door, he enjoyed 14 years there serving the people — emphasis on the word "serving."

"I like being part of the community," says the father of three and veteran of countless bake sales, car washes and ball games. "Rural doctors are truly held accountable to their patients. In a small town, your patients know if you care and they know when you're busting your butt for them. You see them at the store and sit by them at the ballgame. You share the same small-town values."

Values like integrity, hard work and discipline — major players in rural living and in Dr. Monte's favorite past time — Isshin-Ryu.

"Isshin-Ryu is a form of martial arts from Okinawa," says Dr. Monte, who has practiced this form of self defense his entire adult life. "It was used by rural peasants to defend themselves with farm implements against the Japanese samurai who had horses and swords." Although he likes hand to hand combat, it's the history, technicality and discipline that truly interest him. "Still, it's fun to punch people!" he laughs.

And it's this kind of candor and humor that his patients have learned to count on — even appreciate.

"Medicine is a very humbling profession and I've learned that doctors can't know everything," he admits. "I'm not afraid of what I don't know and when I don't have the answer, I tell my patients that I don't know — but, I'll find someone who does. We're still successful and get solutions. I have no agenda that says I have to be the guy providing all their health care. I'm not in it for the glory."

That, he says belongs to someone else.

"I always thought that the science part of medicine would go against my belief that there is a God and he's running things," he says. "But it doesn't. If anything, it's helped that faith because the body is so complex it can't be an accident."

In fact, there are times, says Dr. Monte, that a doctor truly sees the hand of something bigger and more powerful

"Again, medicine is humbling. I remember going through my God complex when I first got out of school and thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. But after a few years of practice you realize you're not in charge of life and death. You see miracles every day and are just glad you had the chance to do your best and help out."

To be the water boy.