



2009 ORCHID AWARDS

KATHERINE MCCOY

WEST PORTLAND PHYSICAL THERAPY

Preventive treatment and education in the physical therapy arena not only form the basis for a business for Katherine McCoy, founder of West Portland Physical Therapy. They're a passion that permeates her whole life, gifts she feels blessed to give back to the world.

Indeed, her artful 4,500-square-foot office in downtown Portland, shows evidence of the volunteer work she has done in Third World countries as a manual orthopedic physical therapist, her specialty. A Chinese painting from a bricklayer who survived the Cultural Revolution decorates one wall, a Peruvian fabric woven by a woman affected by civil war hangs on another.

McCoy's work on the home front is also impressive. Her group recently saved the Oregon Ballet Theatre six-figure sums of money by the way they collaboratively treated dancers' injuries, primarily via implementing appropriate care and preventive techniques. They also provide similar services for sports teams and schools.

With 20 percent revenue growth this year to date over 2008, and 313 percent growth from 2006 to the present, the clinic has been fortunate to operate in an extraordinarily progressive and supportive community, she said.

McCoy actually began the clinic in 1983,



she sold it in 1998, and then reopened it in 2006. It currently employs a staff of 28, and includes offices, private rooms and a small gym for training.

"I personally think that physical therapists should be an integral part of the locus of health care reform because we have the knowledge, when allowed to be imparted, which gives the majority of our population keys to self care for life. Our profession speaks best to prevention, though we are masters of pain relief," she said.

McCoy grew up in Tennessee, and at age 12 was horrified to learn about the Holocaust. She wondered what she could do to help marginalized people.

At the same time, she participated in sports, including gymnastics, which resulted in accidents requiring numerous orthopedic operations. Wanting to help herself and others, she turned to physical therapy.

Upon graduation from the University of Tennessee she directed the physical therapy clinic and burn department at Vanderbilt University's teaching hospital

in Nashville, but quickly became discouraged with "American" therapy techniques. So she took certification classes both here and abroad in orthopedic manual physical therapy.

She describes OMT as a subspecialty of physical therapy: "We are physiological biomechanics that restore function and reduce symptoms. We actually work manually to facilitate lost joint or tissue motion, correct dysfunctional movement patterns."

McCoy moved to Portland in 1981 ostensibly for two years following being accepted to medical school, and fell in love with the community. "My clinic grew on a trajectory that was terrifying because while I loved seeing patients, I had not been formally educated in business," she said. "Our staff exploded from just me to up to 40 employees and grew steadily every year."

Personal reasons led McCoy to sell the clinic in 1998, and she pursued more overseas volunteer work with Medical Teams International and other volunteer groups. Recent trips have included work in Ugandan and Congolese refugee camps. Even after restarting her business, she continues to volunteer locally and overseas.

Her children, Michael, 20, and Madison, 15, also enthusiastically volunteer. "I want them to understand the impact that our citizenship has had on the rest of the world and to strive for lives that evoke a positive effect."

Her clinic's ethos, she adds, lies in a saying often attributed to Winston Churchill: "You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give."

— HOLLY JOHNSON