

# Salem allergist named Rotary "Citizen of the Year"

By Kelsey Bartlett



Mark Henrickson (left) presents Dr. Tom Fame with the "Citizen of the Year" award at last Thursday's Rotary Club meeting. Photo by Kelsey Bartlett.

A tough year is finally turning around for Salem's Dr. Tom Fame.

Fame, 58, who has been in the spotlight for his intense legal battle with the Asthma & Allergy Center of Salem after the company let him go last year, opened his own practice, Dr. Fame Allergy and Asthma two weeks ago. Last Thursday, he was presented with the Rotary Club of Salem "Citizen of the Year" award, an honor he said he never expected. The club has given

an award to a club member annually since 1957.

A devout Catholic, for the past 20 years, Fame has been heavily involved with mission work in Haiti. Fame is a member of Salem's Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church, and now travels to the country twice a year.

He first visited Haiti in 1996, and did pediatric work in the country for a couple of years, before deciding he wanted to do something more relational, and joined the Catholic church's program called the "Haiti 20." Since, he has visited in a rural valley in Haiti, and has helped construct three elementary schools, pay teacher salaries with endowment funds, start a school lunch program, initiate clean water projects, among many other accomplishments. One accomplishment that he said he is especially proud of is the group's launch of a birthing center, reducing the number of birth-related deaths.

"We are honoring a person who has demonstrated a very high level of community service," said Jim Laub of Salem Rotary at the meeting. "They were able to do all of these projects without the presence of established roads, without machinery or electricity. And these projects are all very well done."

He first joined Rotary Club 23 years ago, and said that it has been an integral part of his life. He said his favorite aspect of the club is watching friends grow and evolve as people. The club's strict rules require that members miss no more than three meetings in a row. Rotary, an international service organization, has clubs all over the world. To keep up with the club's attendance requirements, Fame said he even attended a few meetings in Haiti.

"It's a special thing, Rotary," Fame said. "It's a community within a community. There are very few times people stick with things. Once a week you eat lunch with people and you talk to people. You see people grow up, you see some people get sick, and people whose children get married. Some people have grandkids... some people die. You're kind of following people through life."

"You don't really get that kind of perspective with a lot of other things," he added.

"There's something really powerful about those bonds."

A Rochester, N.Y. native, where he grew up as one of nine children, Fame received his undergraduate degree from the University of Buffalo and went to medical school in Texas. He said that it was his 11 years serving as a pediatrician in the Air Force, moving from state to state, that made him realize he wanted to be an allergist. There was no allergist at his Abilene, Texas base, and he was called on to help out at the clinic.

"I just read some text books and learned it," Fame said. "I was doing pretty much everything except making the allergy shots."

Fame then attended National Jewish Center for Immunology & Respiratory Medicine for two years to study allergy and asthma. He moved to Salem with his wife, Leah, and their three small daughters, all the way from Denver, and began LewisGale Medical Center in 1992. He was looking for somewhere with mountains, thinking he would wind up in North Carolina, when he moved to Salem, and said he has been happy in the area ever since.

"It's a whole lot different than where I grew up," Fame said. "It's beautiful here and it's just a friendly type of place."

He fought for his right to open his practice in Salem after the Asthma & Allergy Center of Salem, which he began working for in 2010 and who chose not to renew his contract, asked that he move due to a non-compete clause. Fame said he wasn't ready to uproot his life, and when he finally learned he had won his case in December, was ready to build his business.

Located at 1002 Apperson Dr. in Salem, he renovated the former Bastians Bar-B-Q, which is close to his home.

"I wouldn't want to move away from Salem," Fame said. "I wasn't born or Salem bred, but I'll probably be Salem dead."

Tags: [Citizen of the Year](#), [Dr. Fame](#), [Salem Rotary Club](#), [Tom Fame](#)

This entry was posted on Friday, May 20th, 2016 at 1:39 pm and is filed under [Salem Times Register](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed.