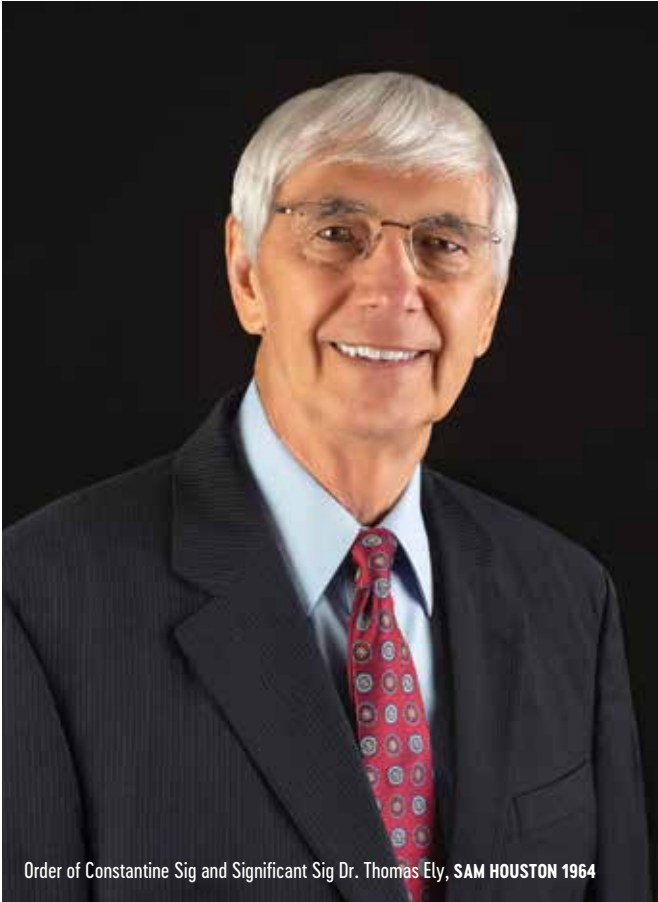


BY WES HOLTSCLAW, EAST TENNESSEE 2012

# EXPANDING OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE

*Order of Constantine Sig and Significant Sig Dr. Thomas Ely, SAM HOUSTON 1964, and Significant Sig Dr. Kevin Klauer, EASTERN ILLINOIS 1986, provide principled leadership to the growing American Osteopathic Association*



Order of Constantine Sig and Significant Sig Dr. Thomas Ely, **SAM HOUSTON 1964**



Significant Sig Dr. Kevin Klauer, **EASTERN ILLINOIS 1986**

**T**heir Sigma Chi journeys might differ by two decades, but the shared values and leadership principles developed through the Fraternity — albeit in different parts of the United States — are impacting one of the fastest-growing branches of medicine in the world.

As president of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) Board of Trustees and CEO of the AOA, respectively, Order of Constantine Sig and Significant Sig Dr. Thomas Ely, **SAM HOUSTON 1964**, and Significant Sig Dr. Kevin Klauer, **EASTERN ILLINOIS 1986**, are working together to navigate difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, achieve the lofty goals of the organization and advance their profession for years to come.

“We are the fastest-growing health care profession in the United States,” Ely says. “We’re going to go from 11 to 12 percent of the physician population to 20 percent by the end of this decade. When I went to medical school in 1976, there were eight colleges of osteopathic medicine. There are 38 now with 59 campuses.”

Whereas medical doctors practice allopathic medicine — which is a classic form that involves treating symptoms and diseases with drugs, radiation or surgery — doctors of osteopathic medicine, or DOs, view their patients more holistically

to reach diagnoses. They believe that all parts of the body function together and influence each other rather than focusing on individual symptoms alone.

“We have a distinct philosophy,” Klauer says. “We offer everything an MD does. Our medical school is just as long, but we also train in osteopathic medicine, and our philosophy is more of a holistic approach to the patient. Everything a physician does, we do, but we do it through a different lens.”

Thanks to the nearly 7,000 new physicians graduating from osteopathic medical schools in 2019, there are now more DOs (121,006) than at any point in the profession’s history — a number that has grown 63 percent in the past decade and nearly 300 percent over the past three decades, according to the AOA.

Through health care reform, graduate medical education funding and advocacy at the state and federal levels, the work of the AOA is increasing osteopathic medicine’s recognition throughout the world.

“It’s very mission-driven work,” Klauer says. “There’s a mission-driven component and an operations component. We’re not just a member services organization; we do serve our members, but our organization also accredits the 38 colleges of osteopathic medicine and their 59 campuses. We also provide board-certification services for osteopathic physicians in any specialty.

“To be a part of something that meant something that had substance and depth, it was really something that meant a lot. I was seeking a brotherhood, and that’s what I found. – Significant Sig Dr. Kevin Klauer, **EASTERN ILLINOIS 1986**”

“Where do we see ourselves a month from now, a year from now [or] 10 to 20 years from now? The profession started in 1874, but we just had our 100th annual House of Delegates meeting. Where do we go for the next century? We won’t make those decisions, but can we position the organization so those that follow us will be positioned to take this where they want to.”

### THE INFLUENCE OF FRATERNITY VALUES

When Klauer arrived at Eastern Illinois University in 1983, his discovery of Sigma Chi was something that immediately shaped his future.

“When I learned what it was about, certainly this was not [just] a social experience. [Sigma Chi] was a community that had values that resonated with me,” Klauer recalls. “To be a part of something that meant something that had substance and depth, it was really something that meant a lot. I was seeking a brotherhood, and that’s what I found.”

“I found the more I learned about it, the more I realized these people were serious about what the Founders developed because they [were] developing people and committing to each other and committing to ideals you would implement no matter where you are in life. No matter what walk of life you’re in or what profession you were in, you would conduct yourself with these ideals. That was pivotal for me. It wouldn’t have mattered what undergraduate campus I was on. Once I learned that, I would’ve begged for the opportunity to be a Sigma Chi.”

Klauer translated that commitment to Sigma Chi’s ideals and the approach of the Fraternity to other initiatives in his life.

He elected to transfer schools to better pursue a career as a physician. North Central College in his hometown of Naperville, Illinois, allowed him to map out a major and curriculum in biology that incorporated medicine, body function and fitness. Upon graduation, he was drawn to medical schools that offered both MD and OD degrees, but the philosophy of osteopathic medicine proved inspirational.

“I didn’t know much about osteopathic medicine,” he says. “I applied to some MD schools, and I applied to some OM [osteopathic medical] schools. I was drawn to the OM schools. Not only did I love the philosophy — much like what happened to me with the Sigma Chi Fraternity — it completely resonated with me and felt like a really good fit. There was no looking back.”

Since earning his degree from the Des Moines University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Iowa, Klauer has been tasked with leading others through a number of positions in his career as a physician, a professor and academic chair, and an executive.

Dr. Klauer served in a variety of capacities during his 15 years with Emergency Medicine Physicians Ltd. while also attaining an executive juris doctorate with honors from Concord Law School. In 2015, he became chief medical officer for hospital-based services, chief risk officer and patient safety executive director for TeamHealth, a leading clinician services organization. In 2019, he was approached to become CEO of the AOA.

“I wasn’t looking, but I was approached to come back home to the osteopathic profession and be the first physician to hold the role of CEO since 1981,” Klauer says. “They wanted to be physician-led and directed. They made that change, and I was very honored to be selected and considered for that role.”

Dr. Ely’s pathway into osteopathic medicine is different than Klauer’s, but it also was aided by Sigma Chi values.

Ely was a founding member of the Fraternity’s Sam Houston chapter and served it as Consul, among other roles. Shortly following his initiation, he discovered notes from an interview with Order of Constantine and Significant Sig Fred Yoder, **OHIO 1957**, that changed his outlook on life.

“There was one sentence that I remember to this day,” Ely says. “‘He has good leadership potential but needs to develop a better rapport with fellow brothers.’ The first thing I did was find out what rapport meant. I thought I was doing that, but obviously I wasn’t. So, I took that one little learning point and made it part of something I’ve tried to do from then on.”

While at Sam Houston, Ely also was core commander of the Army ROTC program on campus. He became a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps and served two tours in Vietnam as a medical evacuation pilot.

From there, he attended the Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences’ College of Osteopathic Medicine, re-entered the military and retired from the Army in 1988 with the rank of lieutenant colonel before opening a private practice in Clarksville, Tennessee.



“To this day, anybody asks me what I got out of membership in Sigma Chi, I got a direction for how to do better at things in my life. It started right there.”

– Dr. Thomas Ely, **SAM HOUSTON 1964**

“[Everything] keeps building and building, and everything you do you learn from,” Ely says. “To this day, anybody asks me what I got out of membership in Sigma Chi, I got a direction for how to do better at things in my life. It started right there.”

Ely later served as chief medical officer for Gateway Medical Center in Clarksville from 2002 to 2015, all while serving as past president of the Tennessee Osteopathic Medical Association and being elected to the AOA Board of Trustees in 2006.

On July 18, 2020, he was inaugurated as the 124th president of the AOA and, alongside Klauer, expressed a commitment to the continued growth of the profession despite the challenges of a global pandemic.

“We’re in the process of rapid growth,” Ely says. “The things we’re doing to upgrade physician education and all of those things that have to be done to keep the members of the profession up to date — we’re doing things that may have been positioned a year or two away, [but] because of the pandemic, they’ve become necessary now.”

#### LEADING DURING A PANDEMIC

The spread of COVID-19 immediately impacted communities everywhere and nearly all facets of life, but none more so than the medical community that includes the doctors and students within the osteopathic medicine profession.

Early on, the medical community and the general public looked to a variety of organizations for recommendations to deal with the pandemic. Klauer and the AOA took a different approach. Instead of following the lead of other organizations and delivering a similar message, the organization carefully constructed its position and considered the impact on their profession.

“When we launched our statement in April, we had already developed 12 to 15 resources and done an amazing amount of work to say: ‘Here’s what we think and believe as it relates to our profession and COVID-19. Here’s how we can support you,’” Klauer says. “Of the 12 or so links, all but one of them were created by the AOA, and the other one was a link to a federal agency page of resources.

“We have challenged our team. What are we going to do to support our members and our profession? We have absolutely risen to the challenge and done an amazing job despite the fact we’re working remotely.”

Klauer and his team have delivered weekly reports to the board of trustees showing the accomplishments of their remote work. The AOA has held more than 30 town halls with members of Congress and state representatives to ensure their members have a direct line to lawmakers. Further, the AOA team created 14 webinars over a 10-week period and email campaigns to congressional members about the need for personal protective equipment, medical practice support and

other items that impact the AOA membership and osteopathic medicine profession.

“We’ve had an extremely effective voice in COVID-19,” Klauer says. “There’s nothing positive to come from COVID-19, but what we have gained is an opportunity to prove our worth, prove our value and test our mettle.”

The work of the AOA has led to board certification exams being available remotely, and Ely notes that encouraging routine care and vaccination safety are among the next goals alongside a yet-to-be-named public health initiative — not to mention continued expansion of the profession and the association itself.

#### A SIGMA CHI CONNECTION

The Fraternity bond shared by Klauer and Ely has not only strengthened their working relationship, but it also has presented a shared values-based approach for the AOA.

“We had a good basic training in Sigma Chi,” Ely says. “I agree with [64th Grand Consul] Keith Krach when he says Sigma Chi is the preeminent leadership organization in the world.

“I’ve worked with lots of leaders throughout the military and otherwise. [Klauer] is so dynamic. He is outgoing and optimally organized. Before I came out with my overall goals, we had a lot of one-on-one discussions and have worked together as a total team. We have an hour-long meeting each week [and] every week. We talk about what we need to do internally and externally to expand osteopathic medicine. We really do work hand in glove.”

Klauer says seeking the most out of individual experiences and embracing opportunities throughout life and using them to inform his life and career has been beneficial.

“When the fraternity that you join and the community you’re a part of says, ‘This is who you should be,’ it helps you to become exactly who you want to be,” he says. “I do think that where I am today has the DNA of the Sigma Chi Fraternity all over it.

“Making sure you capitalize on the opportunities you do have and making sure you’re serving —selfless servant leadership — I’ve applied that a lot recently and talked to people about that. It’s part of our organization and part of the mission. Everything you do is in the service of others and not because you’re trying to accomplish something for yourself. That selfless servant leadership tracks back to the roots of the Sigma Chi Fraternity, as well.”