

MANUEL TZAGOURNIS, M.D.: A Model for Us All!

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He is 70; 2 weeks younger than me! We both joined the OSU faculty about the same time in the 1960s, but I left to work for the United Nations. He stayed to make a name for himself and for us all. He rose swiftly to the top of the hierarchy of the Ohio State University.

From an instructor in internal medicine in 1968, Manuel was promoted to assistant, to associate, and to full Professor 6 years later in 1974; he was appointed Dean of the Medical College 6 years later in 1980 and **Vice President** of Health Sciences in 1982. Manuel served in those capacities until 1999 when he retired to return to his private practice. To appreciate the enormity and vastness of the **medical empire** he was administering consider the fact it is the most comprehensive health science center in the USA, and includes medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, optometry, nursing, veterinary medicine, hospitals, and public health. He played a leading role in the establishment of the school of public health that trains people in preventive medicine, community outreach, immunization, programs that are so critical nowadays. Let me give you a few statistics to get an idea of the phenomenal growth during Manuel's tenure. The budget more than doubled to three quarters of a **billion dollars**, but the endowment funds increased from \$40 to more than \$200 million, a 5-fold increase! Enough statistics; best you read the citation that went with the Distinguished Service Award he got from the Board of Trustees!



I sit across from Manuel for an interview at the university hospital clinic where he is now practicing medicine. His specialty is diabetes. Some of his patients are listed among "Who's Who" in the State Of Ohio. Aronoff, the Republican President of the Ohio Senate who beautified those Doric columns for which the State House is famous; Riffe for whom the building across from the State House is named, the powerful Democrat Speaker of the Ohio House; then there was **Woody Hayes**, [and I do not need to mention to you who Woody was!] Manuel is a dedicated Buckeye who goes to most of the football games, home and away!

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Manuel is surrounded with testimonials to his legacy and immeasurable services to the university, the society, the state; to the Greek community [he was **chairman of the Fair Share** plan for our church for some 30 years; He is a church ARCHON]. He

replies to all questions unhesitatingly, always with a sweet smile. He is smiling with empathy looking me straight in the eye. I can see that this man could never twist the truth or purposely hurt anybody! He does not seem to be the kind of Cretan fighter Kazantzakis wrote in his novels. But he feels Cretan 100%. So, I wonder how this man could rise so high in the fiercely competitive academic environment, and remain unscathed? The fact that Manuel was appointed to all these high posts by 4 different university presidents is proof that it was **his academic skills and innate talents** that propelled him to those dizzying heights; obviously, he had no rival in the whole country!

Manuel you have reached the top of your profession, so what is the thing of which you are the most proud? "**My family**" he replies without blinking an eye. Why? "*Because they are good people, hard working, and serve the community and the church*". Manuel and his wife Madeline whom he met during college days at OSU in **Sigma Phi Epsilon** meetings [so take notice young university students] have 3 boys and 2 girls, all married and with children, 14 grandchildren in all! What did you do to make them good? "*Well, we were strict with them*". Once again, I am reminded that successful kids come from

OSU DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

*"Ohio State's comprehensive Medical College, which today is **internationally recognized** for clinical and research excellence, is in great part the work of **Manuel Tzagournis**. As the **longest serving** Dean and Vice President in the College of Medicine's **history**, he served the University with unwavering dedication during a climate of great change. His legacy is one of compassionate physician, committed educator, and skilled administrator"*

parents who are firm with them. Do you feel Greek or American? *"I feel that I have dual identity. Even though I function as an **American**, many of my friends and **my values are Greek**".* Do you visit Greece? *"About every 3 years since 1963".*

He was born in 1934 in Youngstown, the eldest of 4 boys, all of whom have professional degrees. His mother is still living, but his father was killed in car accident in 1963. Why did you become a doctor? *"It might sound like a cliché, but **I like helping people**".* We know that you like to help, Manuel, and that is why we consider you a model for us to emulate!