

Meet The Dallas Native Who Won UT Southwestern's Highest Graduate Honor

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Dr. Laurie Seidel, winner of UT Southwestern's Ho Din Award. (Credit: UTSW)

Laurie Seidel spent much of her youth in a doctor's office. She played with the toys in the waiting room of her father's private pediatric practice, watching child after child leave the office sniffling with puffy eyes.

She didn't always dream of donning a white coat and a stethoscope. But things don't always work out like you plan them: "Needless to say, I kind of changed my tune as I got older," she says.

Now 26, Seidel has added the title of "Dr." before her name, and last month accepted the highest recognition that a UT Southwestern Medical Center graduate can receive. Seidel has joined the ranks of just a few Dallas natives who have received the Ho Din Award since its inception in 1943. Former U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hucison presented her with the award last month. It is a recognition that places her among a prestigious group of alumni that includes Dr. Joseph L. Goldstein, who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1985. The award recognizes a recent graduate who demonstrates knowledge, understanding of the material, and compassion.

"It's just the way she is," says Kathleen Gibson, president and CEO of the Southwestern Medical Foundation. "What you see is leadership—not just participating and getting volunteer hours. You

see her leading programs and innovating a new program and seeing a need that needs a solution and not sitting back saying somebody else can solve that.”

As a teen, Seidel attended Greenhill High School, where she developed a passion for science. Despite her previous, youthful determination not to join the medical field, her newly-piqued interests grew into seeds of reconsideration.

After high school, Seidel double majored in biology and linguistics at Emory University in Atlanta. Her extracurricular activities during her undergraduate years put her on the path for a career in medicine. However, medical school still wasn't firmly on her mind until her junior year, when it came time to decide whether she should take the MCAT.

“I ended up choosing medicine over a lot of my other interests simply because I was really passionate about making a difference in other people's' lives,” Seidel said.

At UT Southwestern, Seidel participated in many organizations and served in various leadership positions. All the while, she maintained a 4.0 grade point average.

The Southwestern Medical Foundation, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary, goes through a rigorous selection process when deciding each year's Ho Din Award recipient. The foundation searches for someone who is exceedingly wise and scientifically based, says Gibson, as well as one who has demonstrated service and has been seen in action with their patients.

Growing up bilingual made her intrigued in linguistics, Seidel said. This drove her to work with deaf children during high school and lead to one of her first service projects, the Hearing Aid Recycling Project. It was the first time she had an idea and implemented it on her own, Seidel said. The project, working with the Callier Center for Communication Disorders at UT Dallas, recycled hearing aids to donate to people who could not afford to buy them.

“I feel a very strong sense of responsibility to my community and kind of humanity as a whole,” Seidel said. “[The Hearing Aid Recycling Project] was kind of a milestone in my journey and growth; it was the first time I had ever started something by myself-not that I didn't have help.”

Seidel saw her first patient at the Nelson-Tebedo Clinic, a HIV/STD testing and treatment center on Cedar Springs Road, during the summer before she began medical school.

“If you can imagine the very first time you're seeing a patient, they're in a really vulnerable position and they're coming to you for testing or treatment, or have questions and want advice,” Seidel said. “That's the time they're the most vulnerable.”

Seidel is currently performing her pediatric residency at the University of Colorado in Denver. In regards to her future, Seidel is confident she would like to pursue fellowship training, and in the long-term stay in academics, where she feels she can serve the medical community well.

“She has a heart for identifying people who need somebody to advocate on their behalf,” said Dr. Soumya Adhikari, associate professor of pediatrics and director of the pediatrics clerkship at UT Southwestern Medical School. “[Dr. Seidel] has always made an impression on people for her humanism, her desire to be an advocate for patients.”