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Michael A. Repka Presented University's Top Research Award

Longtime UM pharmaceuticals professor honored for his drug delivery work, creative activity

MAY 8, 2020 BY SHEA STEWART

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Michael A. Repka, chair and Distinguished Professor of pharmaceuticals and drug delivery in the University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy, has been awarded the university's 2020 Distinguished Research and Creative Achievement Award. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. — Growing up in a small Texas town south of San Antonio, Michael A. Repka worked in his father's pharmacy.

Frank Repka opened Center Pharmacy in Pleasanton in 1961, and Michael started working there when he was 11 — dusting bottles and shelves, restocking those dust-free shelves and performing various tasks for his father.

"I enjoyed it so much, observing his interactions with patients, that I had no doubt at 12 that I was pursuing that career route," said Repka, who has been named the 2020 recipient of the **University of Mississippi's** Distinguished Research and Creative Achievement Award.

"I was influenced by my dad. He encouraged me to apply to pharmacy school. I liked the idea of eventually joining the family business."

Following in his father's footsteps, Repka earned a bachelor's degree in pharmacy in 1976 from the University of Texas before receiving a Doctor of Dental Surgery from the University of Texas Dental School at San Antonio in 1981.

Repka practiced dentistry for 12 years, but following a four-wheeler accident that affected the manual dexterity of his hands, Repka returned to his first love, pharmacy. He graduated from the University of Texas in 2000 with a Ph.D. in pharmaceuticals and became an Ole Miss faculty member that summer.

The Center Pharmacy remains in the family, as Repka's brother Myron is practicing pharmacy at the family-run store.

Repka no longer practices dentistry, but he's never stopped serving. As chair and distinguished professor of pharmaceuticals and drug delivery in the UM **School of Pharmacy**, Repka has advised numerous students over the years, often telling them to "stay humble" and advance pharmaceutical science — even to a degree they can't imagine as students.

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Campus Briefs

Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. — Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. — Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK — The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's

"Stay focused, create and advise others with your knowledge," he tells his students.

Repka was following his advice – participating as a committee adviser for a thesis defense for a master's candidate (now a master's graduate) – when word came that he had been named recipient of the **Distinguished Research and Creative Achievement Award**.

"This is truly an honor," said Repka, who also is director of the Pii Center for Pharmaceutical Technology in the pharmacy school. "I truly could not believe it when I heard the news. I knew I contributed to the university's mission, but I never believed I would be honored like this. There are just so many faculty that deserve the award.

"There are so many people to thank, and I mean that."

Created in 2008, the annual award recognizes a faculty member who has shown outstanding accomplishment in research, scholarship and creative activity. Applicants are nominated by their peers and reviewed by a committee of past recipients.

"Over his lengthy career, Michael Repka has made an enormous impact both here at the University of Mississippi and, more broadly, in the world of drug delivery," Chancellor Glenn Boyce said.

"Thanks to his unique background and expertise, Michael has given many talented students the opportunity to receive outstanding training, and the university has been enhanced by his research and innovations. We are deeply grateful for Dr. Repka's many contributions that make him so deserving of this recognition."

Previous winners of the Distinguished Research and Creative Achievement Award are Sam Wang, Larry Walker, Charles Reagan Wilson, Dale Flesher, Atef Elsherbeni, Mahmoud ElSohly, Robert Van Ness, Charles Hussey, Ikhlas Khan, Alice Clark, Marc Slattery and **Ron Rychlak**.

"The Distinguished Research and Creative Achievement Award is the highest honor and recognition for scholarly impact at the university," said Josh Gladden, vice chancellor for research and sponsored programs. "We always have an extremely impressive pool of nominees, and the choice is always difficult.

"The impact of Dr. Repka's work in drug delivery, his numerous national and international awards and recognitions, and his impressive record of mentorship and publications were all important factors. Dr. Repka has brought so much to the university community, our state and nation – we are thrilled to honor him in this way."

Coming to UM

Repka and his wife, Staci, both grew up in Pleasanton, so the small-town nature of Oxford was appealing.

"We visited Oxford prior to me being interviewed for a position," Repka said. "We stayed for a week and fell in love with the community."

Walt Chambliss, professor emeritus of pharmaceuticals and drug delivery and research professor emeritus in the Research Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, or RIPS, also was instrumental in Repka landing at the university.

"He convinced me to come here and then supported me all through my tenure at Ole Miss, including now," Repka said.

After joining the university as an assistant professor of pharmaceuticals and research assistant professor in RIPS, Repka was named chair of the then-Department of Pharmaceuticals in 2005 and became a full professor in 2011. In 2012, he founded and was named director of the Center for Pharmaceutical Technology, which was formed to promote collaborations between the pharmacy school and the pharmaceutical industry.

Repka is known for his pioneering work on hot-melt extrusion to produce pharmaceutical dosage forms.

"While I was in between my dental practice and my entry into the Ph.D. program, I worked for a company in Austin, Texas, which was beginning work in hot-melt extrusion," Repka said. "They needed someone with dental and formulation experience. Fortunately, I fit their expectations. A product was born and my door of opportunity in hot-melt extrusion was opened."

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Michael Repka, who was a practicing dentist for 12 years before earning a doctorate in pharmaceuticals, is known for his pioneering work in hot-melt extrusion to produce pharmaceutical dosage forms. Photo by Robert Jordan/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

Since then, Repka has become a leader in hot-melt extrusion technology, and his research and development experience includes seven patents and four patents pending.

He's also been principal investigator or co-principal investigator for nearly \$9 million in grants and contracts. His research has been funded by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation and more.

"My passion for research began when I was practicing dentistry," Repka said. "Several dental companies wanted me to test their products and provide feedback based on mine and my patients' observations.

"Then, an idea for a product to treat ulcers in the mouth was developed over several years. The patented product was then on its way to helping those afflicted by the disease."

A Team Player

Beyond his novel research, Repka has authored more than 190 peer-reviewed publications in prestigious pharmaceutical journals, presented more than 400 peer-reviewed abstract presentations and given some 80 invited speaker presentations and workshops around the world.



UM Provost Noel Wilkin (left) congratulates Michael Repka, chair and professor of pharmaceuticals and drug delivery, on being named a Distinguished Professor during the 2019 end-of-the-semester faculty meeting. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

He is editor of the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists PharmSciTech journal and associate editor of the Journal of Drug Delivery Science and Technology.

On top of all this, he has advised 39 Ph.D. graduates and 19 master's graduates, and taught numerous undergraduate and professional courses at Ole Miss.

"Dr. Repka is a prolific scientist who is recognized as someone at the top of his field," said David Allen, UM pharmacy dean. "In particular, he is recognized as the world's leading authority in hot-melt extrusion, which

puts his department and center on the map globally.

"Most important, Mike is a consummate team player who thinks of others and the school before himself. I am fortunate to work with someone of his stature in the field."

The Distinguished Research and Creative Achievement Award is just one of several honors Repka has earned at the university. In 2012, he was named a fellow of the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists, and in 2019, Repka was **appointed as a Distinguished Professor** at UM, an honorific title started in 2018 to recognize faculty members with sustained excellence.

"At the time, receiving the Distinguished Professor award was my most proud, yet humbling, experience during my research and academic life," he said. "I look at those before me who received this award, and it is overwhelming."

But the honors are not earned through solo efforts, Repka said.

"The School of Pharmacy has provided me the platform to enable all of our department's faculty to excel," he said. "(Former) Dean Barbara Wells believed in our unit, and when Dean Allen took over, he continued to support it.

"I am most proud of the work that I was enabled to do while at Ole Miss – building a department and mentoring and advising graduate students. It all comes down to disseminating knowledge from the university to the rest of the world."

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