

# Starting off on the right foot

The *Number 1 Podiatrist in Central Texas* got his start at Collin College

BY HEATHER DARROW | PHOTO BY NICK YOUNG

**A**NYONE WITH MULTIPLE BONE FRACTURES may resist the idea of living with an external fixator. The large, metal device is typically comprised of pins, clamps and rods that screw into your bones. It looks more like a science-fiction torture apparatus than a modern medical device that allows bones to heal. Keeping individuals' spirits up, for a prolonged period of healing while they feel more like robots than people, takes an exceptional physician who excels in his craft and has a genuine connection to his patients. A doctor like Roderick Hunter.

A podiatric physician specializing in forefoot and rearfoot surgery, wound care and sports medicine, Dr. Hunter is a former paratrooper and Army veteran. He earned an associate degree at Collin College, where he was named a Redman Scholar, which provided him a full ride to the University of Texas at Dallas, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree in biology. Earning his medical degree at The New York College of Podiatric Medicine, he completed his residency at Kingwood Medical Center. His practice serves the Killeen/Ft. Hood area.

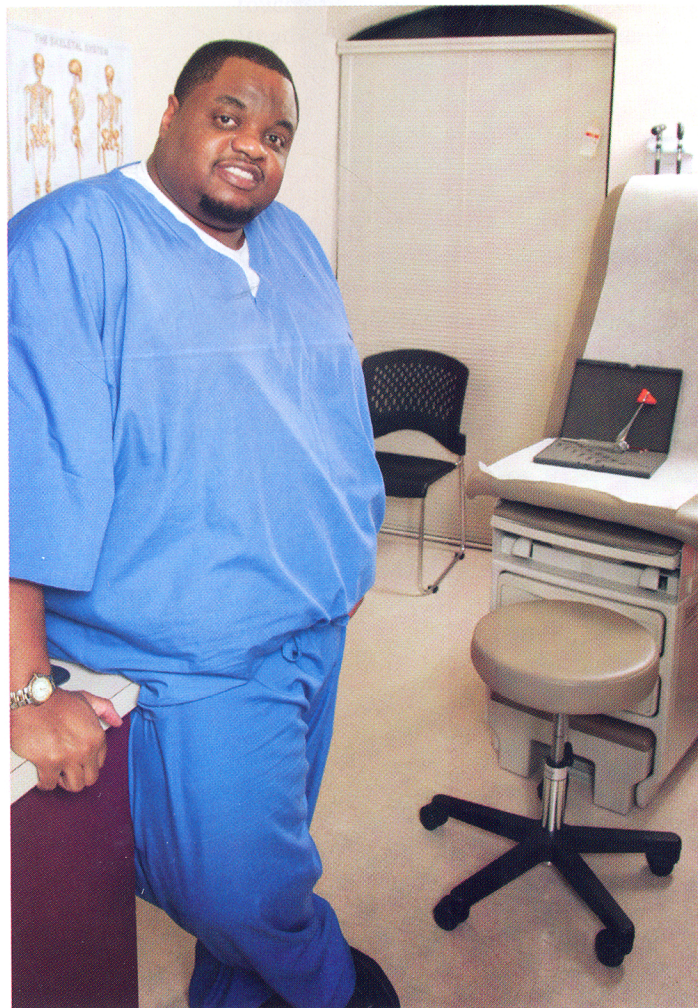
Though Hunter was in the operating room with his office partner, an orthopedic surgeon, for two surgeries on the patient with the external fixator, this woman did not actually meet Hunter until she developed serious wounds. When he recalls his first conversation with this patient, he remembers chuckling as he piped up, "I met you long before you met me," making it a personal goal to get her to smile. "Humor has always been my gateway," Hunter says.

It's no surprise to patients that Hunter was named the 2015 Number 1 Podiatrist in Central Texas via a readers' poll at the *Killeen Daily Herald*, but it was a shock to him. "I wasn't expecting it. For me, it was nothing more than what I normally do, but I thought it was great."

Patient Jay Coakley, an active duty Army sergeant stationed at Ft. Hood, says Hunter is very deserving of the honor. Sgt. Coakley fractured his ankle during physical training, and Hunter performed two surgeries on his left ankle. "He is worthy of an award. Aside from being a great physician, he takes his patients to heart. When he communicates with you, it's like he is communicating with a family member. He does a great job of breaking things down. His patient care and bedside manner are absolutely incredible. I can walk, but we haven't gotten to the five-on-five basketball games, and I told him that's necessary," Sgt. Coakley says, laughing.

When pressed, Hunter says he thinks what sets him apart is the fact that he truly cares about his patients. "I hear from a lot of patients that their doctors didn't listen to them. I just spent 45 min-

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When Army veteran Dr. Roderick Hunter began his journey toward becoming an award-winning podiatrist, Collin College was first on his list.

utes with a patient today. I have a pretty good memory, and I asked her about her grandson. At the end of the day, I believe everybody has a story and wants to tell it."

Once upon a time, Hunter was the one with the story to tell. When he decided to go back to college to become a physician, he was initially reticent to share his goal with others. But when he did, he received a confidence boost that propelled him toward his dream.

Dr. Kyle Wilkison, Collin College history professor, gave him a copy of *Roots*, one of Hunter's favorite books. When he opened the cover, he was forever touched by the inscription "to the future Dr. Roderick Hunter."

"I have never been to any college like Collin College. The care you receive from your professors is amazing. To Dr. Wilkison (and Dr. Mizell), I was not just another student. I could talk to them about what was going on in my life. It developed a sense of trust."

Today, Hunter engenders that trust with his patients, never forgetting a priceless lesson he learned long before he began practicing medicine. "What I do is no great mystery. You can teach any person to perform surgery or regurgitate what is in a book. The human element counts more than anything else. I have a genuine love for my patients—not for my benefit, but for their own." 

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