



James L. Thornton MA, LAT, ATC

EDUCATION: Utah State University (BS), 1987; University of the Pacific (MA), 1989

CAREER: Graduate assistant, University of the Pacific, 1986-88; assistant athletic trainer, University of the Pacific, 1988-90; head athletic trainer, Clarion University of Pennsylvania, 1990-present

VOLUNTEER SERVICE: Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association Executive Board, 1997-2004; National Athletic Trainers' Association District Two Secretary, 1998-2004; National Collegiate Athletics Association Wrestling Rules Committee athletic training liaison, 1999-present; George Garbarino Athletic Scholarship Fund chair, 2000-present; National Athletic Trainers' Association District Secretary/Treasurer Committee chair, 2002-04; National Athletic Trainers' Association District Two, 2005-11; National Athletic Trainers' Association vice president, 2009-11; National Athletic Trainers' Association president, 2012-15; PATS Honors and Awards Committee chair, 2017-present

Why did you pursue athletic training as your career?

While attending a Utah State home football game and watching the AT staff work, it became clear that this would be something that interested me. They really looked like they were helping those athletes. Afterward, it became an easy decision to pursue the profession. It was clear to me that helping others was the essence of the profession and that was just what I felt I should do.

As an AT, it is our job to make people feel better. Although this statement describes virtually all health care professions, there is something special about athletic trainers. My mentors at Utah State had a real interest in the lives of the athletes. The head athletic trainer, Dale Mildenerger, taught the other students and me that it is OK to have fun in our relationship with our patients, but that at the very heart of it all, we really cared about them; we knew how to treat them and had a real interest in how they were feeling and how important it was to them to compete at their highest level.

What is your most memorable moment?

In my personal life, it would be the births of my three daughters. In my professional life it would be the opportunities I had serving on the EATA and NATA boards, but by far the most significant of my memories are

associated with being NATA president. I had the honor of calling and informing members that they were being inducted to the NATA Hall of Fame. The responses were everything from dead silence for up to 60 seconds to asking me to hang up so they could call me back and confirm it was true. I wish every AT in the profession could experience being NATA president. The way I was treated and the kindness offered to me made me want to be a better AT. I met and made lifelong friends in Japan, Ireland and throughout the 10 NATA districts; for this, I am truly grateful.

Who are your biggest mentors and what impact have they had on you?

My father and mother are straight forward, right down the middle of the road, Godly people. I can't say enough good about them.

The past-presidents were a constant support group for me. I called them often and they gave me unbelievably helpful advice that I used every day. Many of them became constant companions and friends – friends that last a lifetime. Eve Becker-Doyle mentored by example. She is a person of incredible integrity, honesty and honor. She weathered many storms as NATA executive director and always came out on top.

Dale Mildenerger and Mike Wilborn taught me that the work is the "thing" as we take care of someone's son or daughter when we work.

Bob was an administrator that understood the value of the AT and supported us in many different ways.

What is the most valuable advice you have received during your career?

My father said that to be successful, you have to work, period. You may have to spend time outside of the "regular" workday to get the job done, but that if you desire real success, doing the extra things are necessary.

The second was from Dale: "Be involved." Dale instilled this in his students by his example and he was not bashful about letting us know that being involved is how the profession progresses and grows.

What advice would you give to young athletic trainers just starting out in the profession?

Being involved in this profession is the only way it will progress. I was asked many times when I was president, about how to get involved. Many members commented that they had contacted their leadership, but that there were not any positions open. I am sure this is the case initially, but members must go back and ask again and again. Being involved in the profession can take many forms. The bottom line is that we have to make a decision to act. Ask, read, vote, participate and donate. That is how this generation will promote the profession now and in the future. §