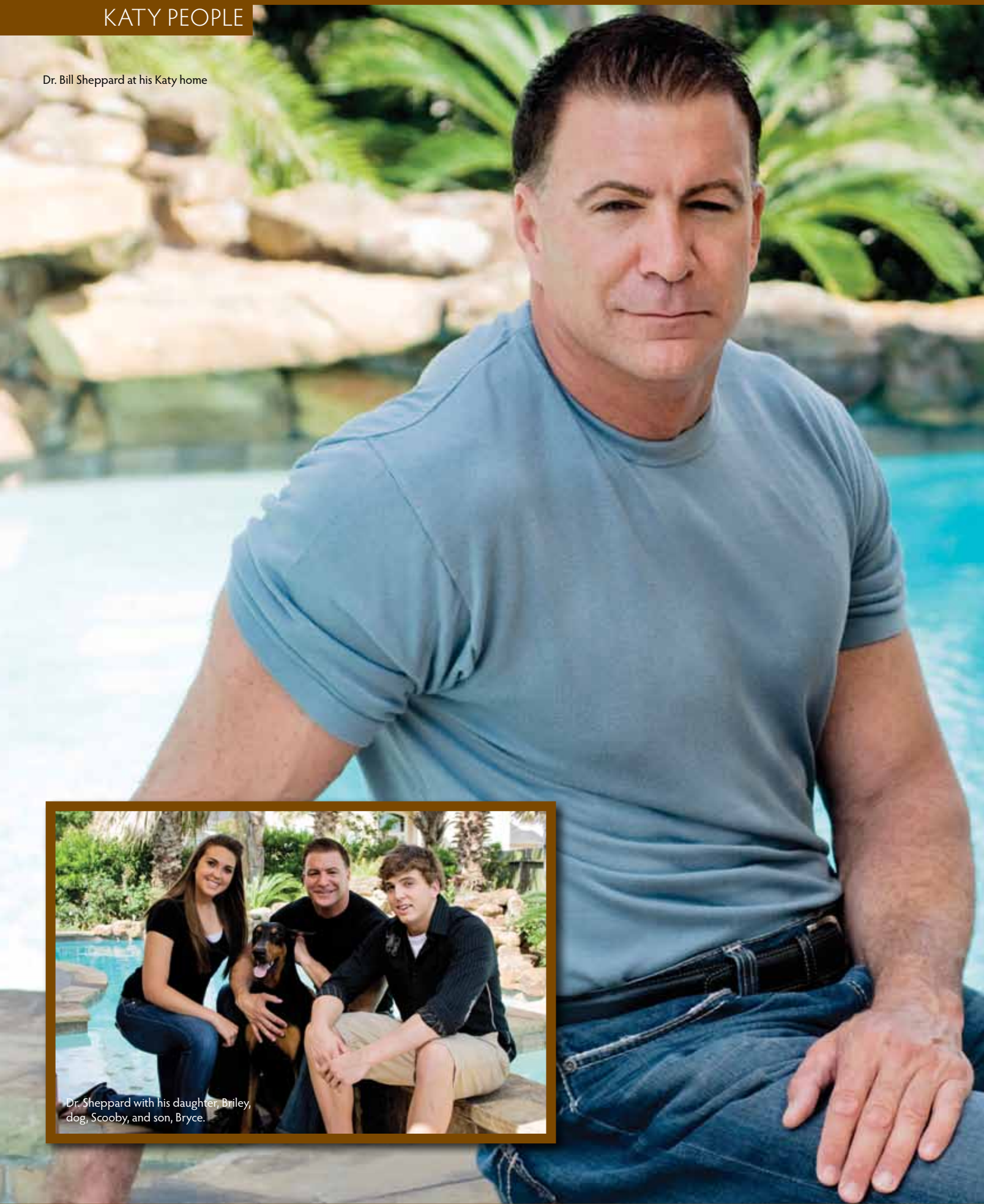


Dr. Bill Sheppard at his Katy home



Dr. Sheppard with his daughter, Briley, dog, Scooby, and son, Bryce.

Katy's Hot Docs

Not only are they easy on the eyes, these Katy doctors are also sizzling with talent and have a burning desire to help others

By Natalie Cook Clark & Photography by Marisa Hugonnett and Suzi Issa

While Houston may be home to a nationally ranked medical center, Katyites have less need to battle the traffic into town. With Katy's medical community growing more quickly than wildflowers on the I-10 feeder, it's now easier than ever for Katyites to get high quality medical care close to home. "As more hospitals and doctors come to Katy, competition increases, as does quality," explains cardiologist, Dr. Ram Thiagarajan. Taking a page from the popular show, *Grey's Anatomy*, you may even find a real-life McDreamy. With an ever-growing pool of talented physicians, you are sure to also find a doctor who cares about you and the Katy community.

Paging Dr. McDreamy

Katy is fortunate to have skilled medical specialists who are committed to the health of others. As early as high school, Dr. Mennen T. Gallas of Gallas Plastic Surgery and Vein Center wanted to go into a field that would give him a professional avenue to help people. "I wanted to use my hand and skills to help people and give back to the community," he explains. This desire landed him in the plastic surgery field, where he works to make people happy every day.

For Dr. Stephen Simonich of UT Katy Orthopaedics, becoming a doctor was impressed upon him at a young age from hearing stories told by his grandfather. Everyone is bound to hear stories of their grandparents at some time or other, but for Simonich, hearing tales of his grandfather being the first pediatrician in Montana was sure to be quite inspirational. His grandfather practiced medicine back when house calls were the norm and antibiotics were not an option.

It was those stories and his desire to help people that encouraged Dr. Simonich to be the best at what he does. While he considers Houston home, he spent time traveling around obtaining the best medical education possible, including a coveted fellowship at the Southern California Orthopedic Institute. Though proud of his educational accomplishments, he is happy to be back home in Katy.

Diagnosing the Future

For Dr. Bill Sheppard of United Chiropractic, the path to studying medicine began early. "In all honesty, I love people and I love science," he says. "I figured if you combined the two, you would be a doctor." At first, he wanted to become a cardiologist. When

he was only 19, he suffered a severe motorcycle injury in which he broke 29 bones and had open heart surgery. The experience gave him the perfect chance to interview several cardiologists about their careers. While he found the heart to be fascinating, he decided to switch his focus from cardiology to orthopedic surgery. A family man at heart, the extensive time away from home with both disciplines proved overwhelming.

When he visited a chiropractor after a high-speed Porsche accident, he knew he had found his calling and has enjoyed helping others ever since. "I have a lot of patients that come to me as a last resort with neck and back pain that no other doctors, medicine, or physical therapy can help," Dr. Sheppard shares. "When they come to our clinic and we give them their life back, it is one of the most rewarding things I can think of."

Being a doctor is a second career for Dr. Brett Donaldson of Grand Vision. Although he was exposed to the optical industry from his father, he chose to go into accounting. While accounting is an in-demand profession, it was not for Dr. Donaldson, who wanted a career where he could do more for people. "People are always happy to see," he says. Even though switching careers required many more years of school, in the end, it was worth the time.

Seeing Things as a Family

Grand Vision of Katy is not just home to one Dr. Donaldson, but two. When Brett went back to school to become an optometrist, he was joined by his younger brother, Ryann. Dr. Ryann Donaldson attended the University of Maryland with high hopes of becoming a successful stockbroker. In 1987, as the world looked to Wall Street on that fated Black Monday, though, he began to question his future career choice. "I still remember that day when I called home," he says. "I was hearing stories of stockbrokers jumping out windows and suddenly, that career path didn't seem as desirable. When my parents informed me that Brett was going back to school to become an optometrist, it just made sense to me."

Now, the two brothers own Grand Vision where they have the opportunity to make a difference in patients' lives every day. "I enjoy dealing with people," says Dr. Ryann Donaldson. Dr. Brett Donaldson adds, "We get to help them and make them feel better. Sometimes, you catch something in an exam where you can save the



Dr. Brett Donaldson and his wife, Fatima at home with their children, Brooke, Shane, and Brittany

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patient's vision or life. Now, that doesn't happen often, but when it has, it is very rewarding to see them throughout the years knowing that I changed their life for the better."

A Healthy Dose of Helping Others

Many Katy doctors are strongly motivated by a desire to serve others. Dr. Thiagarajan always wanted to go into medicine, but always envisioned himself working in a lab as a researcher. During medical school though, he realized that he wanted to have more interaction with patients. He also developed a love and talent for surgery and wanted to use those skills to help others, eventually landing him in the cardiovascular medicine industry. For Dr. Thiagarajan, this path brings him the best patient interaction. "As a cardiologist, a lot of my patients' problems are chronic, so I get to follow up with them and establish long-term relationships," he shares. "I get to help people with what they have or what they don't have."

Even though society often associates plastic surgery as an elective procedure for the upper class, in truth, it can be very life-changing to many who may need it. When Dr. Gallas was a resident physician, he learned the true power of plastic surgery on a trip to South America. He had the opportunity to change the lives of many under-privileged children with cleft pallets and cleft lips. "Transforming lives has always been my driving force," Dr. Gallas shares. One day, he would like to do more of this kind of work, but until then, he is happy making a difference in the lives of his Katy patients.



Dr. Ryann Donaldson and his wife, Nikki

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Dr. Mennen Gallas and his wife, Dr. Stacey Gallas with their children, Peter, Teddy, and Christina

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Caring and Curing in Katy

Being a physician can be demanding, but many Katy doctors take their time commitments to a whole new level and are active in community outreach projects, too. Dr. Simonich uses his knowledge in the orthopedic medicine field to serve as the head team physician for Taylor High School athletics. "Being an orthopedic surgeon is so much more than treating a knee - it is treating the person - and I love the opportunity to interact with these students," he says. He also assists with a running group at Lifetime Fitness in Cinco Ranch.

Dr. Sheppard shares his talents as a physician working with a company that provides medical services and consultation to the Houston Texans and the AMA Supercross. His love of sports has led him to tour with renowned skateboarder Tony Hawk, and some of the top freestyle motocross teams in the world, as well as working with Indy car racing. Well-known in the Katy community, in his free time, he can be found hitting the motocross track or the gym.

Dr. Brett Donaldson and Dr. Ryann Donaldson also find a way to give back and both have a huge presence in the Katy community. "My reality is that the more you give back, the more you get back," Dr. Ryann Donaldson shares. The two work with Glasses for Katy Kids, a program funded by the Katy YMCA Partnership Campaign that provides eye exams, glasses, and contacts to underprivileged students. They are also involved with the Katy Visual and Performing Arts Center and Katy Art Reach, and offer a scholarship program for graduating Katy ISD seniors. "You'll just have a lot better life if you give back," says Dr. Brett Donaldson.

The Doctor Is In

Though local doctors certainly do their part to serve the community, Katy does its part to serve them, as well, with a great work atmosphere



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Dr. Ram Thiagarajan and his wife, Radha, with their sons, Krishna, Karthik, and Kavi



and experience. "In Katy, you get a sense of family and a great family environment," says Dr. Gallas. "The school system is outstanding."

Katy is fortunate to have talented specialists in the community, as well as a great atmosphere that attracts the best of the best. Dr. Thiagarajan puts it best when he says, "People want to come to Katy. It's a growing community that still has the flavor of being small." Dr. Sheppard considers Katy one of the greatest communities around anywhere. "I have so many wonderful friends here and we love to visit all the great restaurants, movie theaters, shops, and the mall," he says. "Also, most business owners in Katy are also residents here.

We all strive to have the best customer service that is second to none. Katy is such a great place, and I have loved raising my two kids here with some of the best schools in the country." He adds, "We have some of Houston's top doctors in Katy, along with some fabulous neighborhoods. I live and work here. Why would I want to be anywhere else?" KM

NATALIE COOK CLARK is happy to be back in her hometown and loves her job as a freelance writer. She lives with her wonderful husband, Stephen, and dog Oscar. They are expecting their first child this July.



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