Dr. Wilbur “Bill” Thain, M.D., was honored recently as the 2013 Alumnus of the Year by Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities. Thain was a member of the original committee that planned the Exceptional Child Center, which later became the Center for Persons with Disabilities, and also served as its medical director for a time.

The Alumnus of the Year is honored for his or her role at the CPD and contributions to the disability community, as well as their career activities after their time at the CPD.

“As one of the founders of the Exceptional Child Center, you not only helped shape the identity and reputation of our fledgling organization, you served thousands of families and trained countless young professionals who participated as interns, trainees, practicum students, and clinicians during those early years,” said Bryce Fifield, current director of the CPD. “Your work had an enormous influence on individuals with disabilities and their families, not only in the immediate vicinity, but throughout the region.”

Thain was born in Logan, Utah but moved with his family to California at age 2. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of California Los Angeles and medical school at the University of Southern California. He interned at the San Diego Naval Hospital, served in the Navy during the Korean War, and then finished his residency in Bakersfield. When he came back to Logan, there were 27 physicians in the Cache Valley, and almost all were family practitioners like himself. Now, he said, there are 220 physicians in the valley. Thain served as the CPD medical director for 13 years, and practiced medicine in Arizona and California before retiring at age 75.

Thain recalled an experience as a medical student that helped shape his perception of disability.

“I was on an OB rotation and the chief resident delivered a lady of a Down’s syndrome child. I went with him to confirm with her that the child had Down’s. The chief resident asked her if she wanted him to put it in the insane asylum because that’s where they all ended up anyway.”

The original committee’s vision of the Exceptional Child Center was very limited at the time, Thain said.

“We looked forward to identifying all the children,” he said. “We also looked forward to a time that we could have an impact. At first, that was just getting them to move. These kids were 7 to 10 years old, and had never been out of bed. They had never been out of diapers, they were fed baby food, they never went to church or school, they never went out. Their mothers kept them confined because they thought they had done something wrong. Most of the early mothers would dredge up something they had done that God was punishing them for … We were looking forward to bringing these children and parents out of the darkness.”

Congratulations to Dr. Thain, the 2013 CPD Alumnus of the Year!