



# Professor, retired colonel recipient of ADA Distinguished Service Award

## Theresa S. Gonzales, D.M.D., continues to demonstrate commitment to underserved

BY DAVID BURGER

**R**etired U.S. Army Col. Theresa S. Gonzales, D.M.D., remembers her childhood dentist well.

"Our dental care was provided by the local dentist in my hometown, and I can honestly say that the only two words that he ever spoke to me, or my four siblings, was 'open' and 'spit.'"

But what he lacked in conversation skills, she said, was made up in abundance with compassion and integrity.

"He was a genuinely kind and honorable man who wore the starched white dental smocks of that era, and he meticulously maintained the environment of care for his patients. He was our dentist, and we were his patients. He encouraged me to consider dentistry as a career, and I did not want to disappoint him. He cared about us, our community and our teeth, in that order."

The daughter of a career soldier, Dr. Gonzales grew up to become both a dentist and ultimately a colonel in the U.S. Army.

Now chair of the department of advanced specialty sciences and director of the Ryan White Dental Clinic at the Medical University of South Carolina's James B. Edwards College of Dental Medicine, she has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to leadership, education, military readiness, veterans and serving the underserved.

For that, the ADA Board of Trustees is awarding her the Association's 2024 Distinguished Service Award, one of the highest honors the ADA bestows on its members.

"In addition to her distinguished service in the military, Dr. Theresa Gonzales has been an educator for

nearly 35 years," said ADA President Linda J. Edgar, D.D.S. "She brings her real-world experiences as an oral and maxillofacial pathologist to the classroom, along with her perspectives on the importance of interprofessional collaboration for optimal patient

care. Amid all of these roles, she also advocates for improved dental care for veterans in her service on the board of the ADA Foundation. I am so happy that she is being recognized for her many years of service to her patients, to the next generation of

dentists, and to our country."

Dr. Gonzales will accept her award in October at SmileCon 2024 in New Orleans.

"Generally, people have encouraged me to achieve whatever was humanly possible with the knowledge, skills and attributes that I possess and for that I am truly grateful," said Dr. Gonzales.

### ARMY OF ONE

Mark A. Miller, D.M.D., M.D., associate professor, faculty endowed chair and associate dean for hospital affairs at the James B. Edwards College of Dental Medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina, said Dr. Gonzales was in the top 1% of all clinicians he has ever worked with.

See DSA, page 14



Photos courtesy of Dr. Gonzales

**Impart:** Theresa Gonzales, D.M.D., delivers a speech as the 2023 Medical University of South Carolina commencement speaker.



**Hobby:** Dr. Gonzales shows off her latest catch while engaging in her favorite pastime. "For the most part I am a catch and release person, and waters off the Carolina coast never disappoint," she said.

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