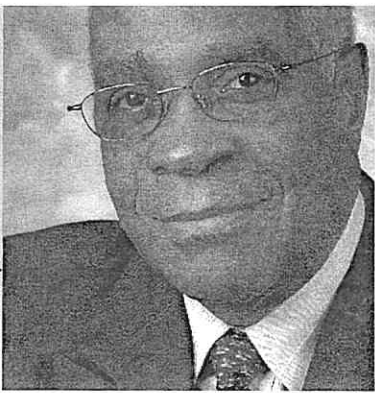




## HONORARY ALUMNI AWARDS



Rodrigue Mortel

To Rodrigue “Rod” Mortel for the undeniable positive impact of his foundation and his leadership in the academic medical field.

A particular early memory has never left Rod Mortel, serving as the catalyst for his lifelong pursuit of education and the main reason he entered medical academia rather than private practice.

Mortel was born and raised in Haiti, and when he was 11 years old, his family was evicted. The reason? They couldn’t afford the four dollars for rent, and Mortel remembers his mother saying this never would have happened to their family if she were educated; Mortel’s parents never learned to read and write.

“That has stayed with me forever,” Mortel said. “I decided to really do my best and receive the highest education that I could and make myself somebody that my mother and father could not be.”

Mortel never wanted to be in the same position, and thus began his ascent up the scholarly ladder. He joined Penn State’s College of Medicine as an assistant professor in 1972, and rose to full professor in the Department of Obstetrics and

Gynecology five years later; he became the first black foreign-educated chair of one of the 126 medical schools that have such a department. Finally, in 1995, he was promoted to associate dean and became the founding director of the Penn State University Cancer Center, the forerunner to the Penn State Hershey Cancer Institute.

Although Mortel retired from practice in 2002, he remains active in the University. Mortel endowed two separate visiting scholar lectureships and is a member of Penn State’s Emeritus Faculty Organization.

Mortel also wanted to make education more accessible to people in Haiti, so he founded the Mortel Family Charitable Foundation in 1997. Through grants he received while at Penn State, Mortel’s foundation has built five schools since 2001 that range in level: preschool, elementary, high school, trade school, and literacy. The schools accommodate 1,500 students, with Mortel saying, “We cover education in a broad spectrum.”

“I could not think of a better way to give back to Haiti than to educate the children of Haiti,” he added. “I especially wanted to help the poor because I was one of them, and somebody gave me a chance. That’s

the reason I created the foundation: to educate the poorest of the poor in Haiti.”

Every year since 2003, approximately 40 students from Maryland and California visit Haiti and volunteer during an annual summer camp that allows them to directly interact with the Haitian students. Mortel said they find the experience extremely gratifying, and the impact stays with the American students, who have formed their own group: The Mortel Foundation Alumni. The network has its own website and Facebook page, with students wanting to maintain and grow their connection with Haitian students.

“It’s been a life-changing experience for all the students that have visited Haiti; they cannot believe that people can be so poor yet so happy,” Mortel said, “So it’s been gratifying on both sides—in Haiti and also for the American students.”

Mortel has received numerous awards for his work in the medical field. He also is a permanent deacon in the Roman Catholic Church, having been ordained in 2001, incardinated in the Diocese of Gonaives, Haiti. Both in 1993 and 1997, Mortel was named one of the Best 401 Doctors for Women in the U.S.

Additionally, Mortel has been a motivational speaker for nearly the past three decades, addressing high school college students, and he said his own life story illustrates what he tells the students.

“My main message in all the speeches I have given is this: You can be what you want to be, providing you work hard, you are honest, and you have a goal,” Mortel said. “Don’t let anybody tell you that you can’t be what you want to be.”

Mortel is a life member of the Penn State Alumni Association and lives in Hershey, Pa., with his wife, Cecilia. They have two daughters: Renee ’00 and Denise.