

Celebrating Excellence: TAPA's 2025 Award Recipients

Each year, the Tennessee Academy of PAs honors individuals who exemplify excellence, leadership, and service within the PA profession. The 2025 award recipients reflect the very best of our community — from seasoned clinicians and educators to rising student leaders and dedicated preceptors. We are proud to recognize the following outstanding individuals.

PA of the Year: Natalie Stafford, PA-C

TAPA's 2025 PA of the Year, Natalie Stafford, exemplifies the highest standards of clinical excellence, integrity, and patient-centered care. Currently serving as Lead Advanced Practice Provider at Resolve Pain Solutions, and formerly a key provider at Mays & Schnapp Neurospine and Pain, Natalie has made a profound impact on patients navigating complex pain management.

Known for her compassion and attentive listening, Natalie partners closely with her patients to understand their goals and deliver personalized, evidence-based care. Her commitment to diagnostic accuracy, risk reduction, and safe opioid prescribing has led her to champion non-pharmacologic therapies and thoughtful de-prescribing strategies that promote long-term wellness.

Beyond the clinic, Natalie's leadership has influenced care across the state. In late 2024 and early 2025, she served on a statewide task force through the Tennessee Medical Association and the Opioid Abatement Committee, helping update continuing education for prescribers statewide. Her ability to navigate complex and sensitive topics made her a trusted and influential voice.

Natalie also serves on the TAPA Board of Directors as a Director At-large and represented Tennessee nationally as a delegate (2023) and an alternate delegate (2024) to the AAPA House of Delegates. Her dedication extends into the community, where she serves as a Team Leader at Oikos Church, organizes diaper drives, provides meals to college students, volunteers monthly with Freedom Prayer, and lectures at UTHSC, educating PA students on safe opioid prescribing.

As a mentor and advocate, Natalie supports the onboarding and professional growth of both PAs and NPs, fostering a supportive and collaborative practice environment. Widely respected by colleagues across disciplines, her leadership continues to shape the future of PA practice in Tennessee.

Student of the Year: Paxton Barnes, PA-S

TAPA is proud to recognize Paxton Barnes as the 2025 Student of the Year — a rising star whose leadership, work ethic, and heart for service embody the promise of the PA profession.

Paxton is currently a student in the Milligan University PA Program, where she began her studies in January 2024. In a short time, she has distinguished herself academically, clinically, and as a leader among her peers.

Her journey to PA school reflects discipline and determination. As an undergraduate at Milligan University, Paxton excelled academically while competing as a four-year student-athlete on the volleyball team. She served as co-captain of her team, Vice President of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, earned consistent placement on the Dean's List, and received the Champion of Character Award her senior year.

Paxton's commitment to service is evident through her volunteer work with Kids Against Hunger, Habitat for Humanity, and her local church. This fall, she further extended that commitment on a medical mission trip to Kenya, serving alongside classmates and faculty.

An enthusiastic advocate for the PA profession, Paxton currently serves as the AAPA State Chapter Student Representative and as a Milligan PA Program Ambassador, welcoming and mentoring prospective students. Now thriving in the clinical phase of her education, she continues to exceed expectations with her preparation, communication skills, and passion for patient care.

Educator of the Year: Rachel Enigk, PA-C

TAPA's 2025 Educator of the Year, Rachel Enigk, has made a lasting impact on PA education through innovation, advocacy, and unwavering support for students.

A 2013 graduate of the Methodist University PA Program, Rachel brings more than 11 years of experience in vascular surgery and has spent the past five years on faculty at the South College PA Program. As Course Director for Clinical Assessment and Management II, Fundamentals of Surgery, and Co-Course Director for Clinical Assessment and Management III, she brings clinical excellence to life in the classroom through engaging and creative teaching strategies.

Rachel's leadership extends across the program. She serves as Faculty Chair of the Didactic Subcommittee, advisor to the PA Student Society, and a leader on both the

V.O.I.C.E.S. Committee and Simulation Committee, shaping curriculum, culture, and student wellness.

Her passion for service is equally inspiring. Rachel played a key role in raising \$50,000 for the Knoxville Dream Center through the Fairways for Dreams Golf Tournament and leads student outreach through PAEA's Project Access, introducing underserved youth to the PA profession.

As Chair of the South College Knoxville chapter of the AAPA Student Society, she supports initiatives that foster connection, wellness, and community. Through her work on the V.O.I.C.E.S. committee and her current Doctor of Medical Science research, Rachel continues to champion inclusivity, parental support, and equity in graduate medical education.

Preceptor of the Year: Bailey Jessee, PA-C

Bailey Jessee, TAPA's 2025 Preceptor of the Year, is recognized for his exceptional mentorship, service, and dedication to educating future PAs.

A PA in the Emergency Department at Greeneville Community Hospital East, Bailey's commitment to service began with four years in the United States Army and continues to define his professional life. A 2021 graduate of the Milligan University PA Program, he has precepted numerous students over the past four years, offering one of the program's most sought-after emergency medicine rotations.

Bailey's teaching style blends hands-on experience with individualized mentorship, creating a high-impact learning environment. His service extends far beyond the hospital through volunteer work with the Washington County Rescue Squad, VA Medical Center Long-Term Care Facility, Holston Habitat for Humanity, and Providence Medical Clinic.

He remains deeply connected to PA education as an OSCE evaluator, Advisory Committee member, and advocate for Milligan PA students. Most recently, he served as the keynote speaker for the 2025 White Coat Ceremony, inspiring the next generation of PAs.

Bailey's excellence has been recognized through numerous honors, including the Albert T. Kissel Veteran's Caucus Scholarship, ETSU Veteran's Health Science Internship, and the 2022 TAPA PA/Physician Team of the Year Award.

TAPA is honored to celebrate these exceptional individuals whose leadership, service, and dedication continue to elevate the PA profession across Tennessee and beyond.