Andrew Rinker, M.D., a prominent New Orleans pediatrician, passed away peacefully on March 10, 2016, at his home. He was known as Andy to his family and friends. He devoted his life to his family; the care, development and well-being of children; public service and his passion for fishing.

Dr. Rinker was the youngest of four children. Ronald Reagan, the future U.S. President, who, at the time was a student and quarterback of the football team at Eureka College, Illinois, was his babysitter and taught him to swim. In high school, Andy Rinker was the quarterback of the football team, head of the student council and editor-in-chief of his high school newspaper *The Nautilus*. During summers he taught canoeing and rowing at the Boy Scout Aquatic Schools and in camps in Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin, where he served as waterfront and camp director. He also found time to earn the rank of Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts of America and participate in the Explorer Scout program. He was selected a member of the Order of the Arrow at the Kashapiwigamak Lodge of the Creve Coeur Council. His boyhood home had historical significance as stone monuments there commemorate places where Abraham Lincoln spoke on this road to the White House.

He attended Harvard University and the University of Illinois. He graduated from Tulane University in 1953 with a Bachelor of Science in Geology. He initially was attracted to Tulane and New Orleans because of the Mardi Gras holidays and the attractive co-eds. At Tulane, he received the W.A. Tarr Award as the outstanding earth sciences major and was a member of the Sigma Gamma Epsilon honorary earth sciences society. He was a member of the Tulane chapter of Alpha Phi Omega national service fraternity. He also graduated from the Tulane School of Medicine in 1957. While at medical school, he was a member of the Nu Sigma Nu medical fraternity and received the New Orleans Pediatric Society Award for the top graduating senior.

After an internship at McLeod Infirmary in Florence, South Carolina in 1958, he completed his Tulane residency in pediatrics at Charity Hospital of Louisiana at New Orleans in 1960. Following his residency, he served for two years as a captain and as chief of pediatrics of the U.S Army Medical Corps at White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. While Dr. Rinker was in the army medical service in New Mexico, General Schinkel recruited him to lead geology expeditions through the regional caves and other geological formations and to the Trinity Site where the first atomic bomb was detonated. Dr. Rinker collected at the site pieces of Trinitite, a new mineral created from other minerals which comprise the desert sand by the explosion of the atomic bomb. He received the Army Commendation Medal.

Upon returning to New Orleans after his military service, Dr. Rinker joined the Diaz-Simon Pediatric Clinic. Within a few years, he established his own medical practice where he would frequently treat up to 100 patients per day. He greatly enjoyed helping children and their parents. Many of his patients enjoyed his disposition and manner so much that they refused to move on to internists and other specialist doctors when they reached adulthood. Dr. Rinker was especially pleased when he had the opportunity to treat the children and grandchildren of his former patients.

In addition to treating his patients in his offices, he was more than occasionally asked for medical advice from patients, or more likely, his patients’ parents, when he saw them at his home, their home, at grocery stores, at social events or even while on his exercise walks with his wife Frances. The parents of
one patient even wrote in chalk on the sidewalk outside of their home, on a path Dr. Rinker was known to take his early morning walks, that they wished Dr. Rinker would stop at their home as he passed their house to examine their sick child. He good-naturedly complied and would smile upon remembering similar events. He was also known to answer the frequent phone calls of anxious parents at all hours of the night. His often laughed and feigned frustration when parents would argue with him that the child’s grandparents (who were not medically trained) had insisted on a different and inappropriate home-remedy course of treatment for their child.

Dr. Rinker was active in numerous medical professional societies. He was chairman of the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health where he co-authored the Council on Child Health’s Medication for Hyperkinetic Children for the American Academy of Pediatrics Journal. He was also a member of the Academy’s Council on Child Health and the Committee on Infant and Pre-School Children. He was certified by and a member of the American Board of Pediatrics and a member of the Louisiana State Medical Society, the Orleans Parish Medical Society, the Greater New Orleans Medical Society the New Orleans Pediatric Society, the Louisiana Pediatric Society, the Irish and American Pediatric Society and the American Medical Association.

He wrote and published an article in 1959 with Dr. R.V. Plateau in the professional publication Journal of Pediatrics (23:962) on Acute Subdural Effusions and Late Sequella of Meningitis. He wrote numerous other medical articles for professional journals.

He was a clinical professor of medicine at the Tulane University School of Medicine where he also served on the medical school’s admissions committee. He received several commendations from the Tulane University School of Medicine for outstanding service as a community preceptor. He was a member of the medical staff of Ochsner Medical Center, Southern Baptist Hospital, Children’s Hospital and Touro Infirmary, Chief of Pediatrics at East Jefferson General Hospital and a visiting staff member at Charity Hospital of Louisiana. In his last few years of practice, he was affiliated with the Ochsner Children’s Health Centre in Metairie, Louisiana.

He managed to balance his professional career with his commitment to public service. Dr. Rinker was always anxious to help his fellow man. He had learned the importance of public service from his family. His father, a college physics and geology professor, had served as the county surveyor for many years without compensation. He donated his land and resources to a college to build an extensive open-air amphitheater. When Andrew Rinker was a teenager, his older brother, James, who at 22 was one of the youngest Army Air Corps pilot lieutenants, was killed in action over China during World War II and received the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Dr. Rinker didn’t just talk about public service; he went out and did it. Dedicated, as always, to the development and education of children, Dr. Rinker, with six children of his own, worked closely with his children’s schools and served as president of the Academy of the Sacred Heart Father’s Club. He was also on the school advisory committees at Holy Name of Jesus School, Jesuit High School and De La Salle High School and on the Blue Jay Parents’ Club of Jesuit High School.
Dr. Rinker’s commitment to education did not end with assistance to the schools his children attended. He was elected on a city-wide basis to serve on the Orleans Parish School Board which governed all of the area’s public schools from 1965 to 1971. Philanthropist Edith Stern, along with community leaders, George Denegre, Harry McCall, Jr., Alton Ochsner, Harry B. Kelleher, Mrs. Paul McIlhenny and Suzanne Ormond, persuaded the physician to add to his already significant commitments and run for the School Board. In general, Dr. Rinker’s School Board obligations included active participation in weekly public board meetings often running late into the night; attendance at the many school graduation and awards ceremonies; meetings with school architects, builders, insurers, state and city authorities, school system administrators, principals, teachers’ unions, concerned members of the public and the media. This alone was quite a personal commitment of time, energy and skill, especially since the position was completely unpaid. He helped lead the New Orleans public school system through the devastation of Hurricane Betsy and through major teachers’ labor union strikes.

These were difficult years for the public school system nationwide. Following Congress’s enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the federal government mandated the immediate integration of the public schools. Strong protests were launched by both sides of the controversy. In New Orleans, the integration of schools fell upon the shoulders of the School Board on which Dr. Rinker served. When he became president of the Orleans Parish School Board, he was the youngest president of a US big-city school system.

Dr. Rinker was at the time quoted in local news coverage as saying: “Public education in Orleans Parish is approaching excellence. We could have the finest school system in the U.S. if we will devote the time, money and patience.” He added the most formidable obstacle facing public education here is possible adverse public reaction by either the white or African-American communities to complete integration of the public schools and faculty integration by 1969 as mandated by the federal government.

The times were so highly charged that angry segregationists even burned a cross on Dr. Rinker’s front lawn in the presence of his children, all of whom were then under eight years old. As President of the Orleans Parish School Board, Dr. Rinker testified before Congressional committees on education, health and funding issues. He was even threatened with imprisonment by John Doerr, if the Orleans Parish School Board did not act faster than the board thought feasible towards the full integration of the public schools. John Doerr was the assistant federal prosecutor in the impeachment of Richard Nixon and Deputy Chief of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department under Robert Kennedy. Dr. Rinker strongly believed in fulfilling his official duties to the letter of the law and genuinely strived to provide all students access to quality education.

The Louisiana School Board Association had booted out the Orleans Parish School Board from membership in 1961 when the Orleans Parish School Board took the position that the schools should be kept open even though integrated by federal court order. Louisiana Superintendent of Education, William J. Dodd, had taken the unusual position that if federal control over the schools came about and federal funding of the schools was ended because of the failure of the schools to integrate, the schools should “give up all federal aid and go on without it.” The New Orleans Chamber of Commerce had taken a similar position. By January 1966, however, without changing its position that the Orleans Parish
schools would remain open even in the face of federal orders to integrate the schools, the Orleans Parish School Board, with Dr. Rinker as vice president, had been re-admitted as a member of the Louisiana School Board Association and had gained the support of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce.

However, despite the intense opposition to integration at the time and his own concerns, Dr. Rinker, by no means a racist, was instrumental in implementing the federal mandate to integrate the schools.

Dr. Rinker proposed and introduced the first comprehensive health examinations of public school children at the schools. In some cases, this was the first opportunity many children had had the opportunity to be checked by a doctor. Dr. Rinker also supported the introduction of sex education classes in the public schools. An issue of some controversy in the 1960s, sex education is now a regular part of a child’s education in the secondary schools and is currently supported by medical and educational experts nationwide. Dr. Rinker dedicated the Marion Abramson High School with a speech on the “Role of Public Education in Character Building.”

Despite having to deal with the difficult issues of integration, labor strikes and the cleanup after Hurricane Betsy, Dr. Rinker achieved success on the school board by reducing bulging class sizes by fifty percent, securing the financing for the public schools by obtaining voter approval for a one-cent city sales tax dedicated for the public schools, establishing special classes for the learning disabled, introducing Project Head Start to help disadvantaged pupils catch up with their peers before beginning their formal education, bringing in computers to the schools, enhancing teachers’ professional status and compensation, increasing recruitment of teachers, obtaining accreditation for schools which had not previously met requirements, decentralizing of administration, appointing a full time medical director, retaining of junior high school interscholastic athletics, making advancements in school desegregation, beginning the installation of air-conditioning in the schools and undertaking millions of dollars in major construction projects for new schools. He first described the children, rather than the port or the petro-chemical business, as the most important resource of the community.

Dr. Rinker, upon election as president of the Orleans Parish School Board on January 9, 1967, was quoted in the New Orleans States-Item:

New Orleans has graduated. Today, this is a city worth living in, a city worth raising your children in. We’re a city dealing in new ideas, new construction, new bridges, new professional sports, a new outlook on education....There are new voices in the business community and on the City Council. It’s a new era....We’ve reduced by almost 50 per cent the size of classes that were bursting at the seams. We’re beginning our first special classes for partially brain-damaged children. Computers are going into two of our high schools. Our teachers have raised both their professional status and their earnings. There are nearly $20 million in new schools under construction. We will start air-conditioning schools so they can be used year-round....I heard people say our most important resource is the port or the oil and gas industry, but they’re wrong. Our most important resource is our children. If we can’t educate them and enlighten them and help them grow strong and healthy, we won’t have anything.
He was a member of the Louisiana School Boards Association, the National School Boards Association, Steering Committee of the Big City School Boards Section of the National School Board Association (43 largest school systems in the United States), the Board of Managers of Delgado Community College, the Total Community Action Committee, the City of New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, the Executive Board of the New Orleans Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America, the Chairman of the Health and Safety Committee of the New Orleans Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America, The Young Men’s Business Club of New Orleans and the chairman of Operation Reach, a drug abuse prevention program. He served as a troop committeeeman of Boy Scout Troop 55. He was also a member of the Holy Name of Jesus Church Committee on Development. New Orleans Archbishop Philip Hannan asked him to serve on the Archdiocese’s Board for the Hearing Impaired known as the Chinchuba Institute.

In 2004 and 2005, Dr. Rinker and his wife, Frances, worked in the Order of Malta’s Medical Mission Program at Christo Sana in Granada, Nicaragua, caring for impoverished and ill children.

Despite his extensive medical, professional and civic commitments, Dr. Rinker always had time for his family. He regularly attended school events for all six of his children. Dr. Rinker raised his children as Catholics, according to his wife’s wishes, and sent them to Catholic schools. He assisted with their school work. He participated in their scouting activities and trips. He brought them to school dances and games and helped them with team sports and other athletic activities. He always took them on annual family holidays for several weeks each year. He regularly prepared all of the family’s annual holiday dinners. He often brought them sailing on his Columbia Challenger on Lake Pontchartrain.

He also taught his children to participate actively in his own passion—fishing. The boys and girls all learned to launch and drive boats, bait hooks, remove fish from lines and clean the day’s catch. His interest in fishing in South Louisiana waters, especially those around Shell Beach, eventually drove him to build his own boat in the family garden. He built a 37-foot fiberglass Lafitte Skiff named Miss Fitz in honor of his wife, Frances Fitzpatrick. Dr. Rinker drove his boat on his regular Wednesday fishing trips with friends and family members. He was proud that the boat never broke down and that he regularly towed in the vessels of distressed fishermen. He was regularly successful in his fishing pursuits, often returning home with at least a large ice chest full of fish to the delight of his family and neighbors who received a share of this bounty.

Dr. Rinker enjoyed his fishing to the extent that he usually organized a fishing expedition with his wife on their vacations. He fished from the rivers of Ireland through the bonefish shallows of the Bahamas to the sea depths near Mexico and the frigid waters of Alaska.

Andrew Rinker was born on December 16, 1930, in Eureka, Illinois, and was the son of Alta Patience Clemens and Jacob A. Rinker. He married his true love, Frances Marian Fitzpatrick, of Shreveport, Louisiana, on December 23, 1955. Frances and his six children, Andrew, Walter, James Clemens, Frances Marian, Mary Elizabeth and Patricia Susan, and six grandchildren survive him. Dr. Rinker was a long time member of the School of Design, a charter member of the Krewe of Bacchus and a life member of the Southern Yacht Club. As descendant of several patriots, his name is listed among the Sons of the American Revolution.
A funeral Mass will be held on Monday, March 14, 2016, at 1:00 pm at Lake Lawn Metairie Funeral Home. A reception will follow. In lieu of flowers, please send any donations to Associated Catholic Charities of New Orleans, Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province or United Way of Southeast Louisiana.