



Brooksville honors one of its own, a world-famous doctor

By Joel Anderson, Times Staff Writer
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Dr. Paul Farmer is engrossed in editing a letter in 2004 as conversations go on around him after a nightly staff meeting at his home in Cange, Haiti. He graduated from Hernando High in 1978.

BROOKSVILLE — In some of the world's most desperate and poverty-stricken countries, Dr. Paul Farmer has gone about the arduous work of providing free health care and the tools to fight a number of infectious diseases.

Farmer has made this his life's work for the past 20 years, far away from the area he once called home and was raised for much of his childhood.

But Brooksville has remembered Farmer despite the distance.

On Monday night, the Brooksville City Council unanimously selected Farmer as the 2008 Great Brooksvillian. Farmer will be officially recognized in October during Brooksville's Founders Week.

"He brings a positive light to our area," Mayor David Pugh said. "We'd love to have him back in October and we'll do everything we can to facilitate that."

Farmer, 48, is the Presley Professor of Medical Anthropology at Harvard University and an attending physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

He is also one of the founders of Partners in Health, a nonprofit health and social justice organization that provides free treatment to poverty-stricken residents of Haiti.

His work has been profiled in a bestselling book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*, by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tracy Kidder.

Farmer got his start in Hernando County, where he was raised with five brothers and sisters in a converted school bus in a campground just north of Brooksville and on a boat docked at what is now Jenkins Creek Park. Farmer went on to become valedictorian of the Hernando High Class of 1978, and was also voted class president and named "most popular" senior.

"You knew growing up that Paul was going to do something extraordinary," said Lara Bradburn, a city councilwoman and a friend of Farmer. "We just had no idea it would be to this magnitude."

Farmer didn't immediately return an e-mail seeking comment Tuesday.

The other nominee for this year's honor was Dr. B.R. Raju, a former chief of staff at Brooksville Regional Hospital.

Last year's winner was the late Arthur St. Clair, a former slave who went on to become Hernando's first post-Civil War voter registrar, founded Bethlehem Progressive Baptist Church and established the county's first all-black school.

Other honorees include longtime civic leaders Alfred McKethan, local historian Virginia Jackson and Brooksville City Hall Art Gallery maven Mary Alice Queiros.