

## Every Kid is Gifted (In Their Own Way)

# Dr. Melinda Peterlin

By Cynthia Robinson Photography by Mike Force Photography

Melinda Peterlin never had any doubts about what she wanted to be when she grew up. “I knew at 7-years-old,” said the pediatrician, who joined Southeast Georgia Physician Associates, St. Simons Pediatrics four years ago. “I knew I wanted to help kids. I have no idea what I would do if I didn’t do this. It was not really a choice for me,” she added, laughing.

After completing her training, Melinda practiced medicine in several locations, including two years near Heidelberg, Germany, and a memorable stint in northern Wisconsin. “We were in an area further north than parts of Canada; I couldn’t handle the weather. I worked in an underserved area, so it was a great experience, but the weather was crushing,” she said, laughing again. “I was not cut out for that!”

When an opening came up for a pediatrician with Southeast Georgia Health System, Melinda said both she and her husband, Don, thought it the perfect fit for their family. “We wanted to retire to a place like this. So, I said, ‘Why wait until we retire?’”

Don, a former investment banker who became a stay-at-home dad for their son Alex, now 12, knew about the Golden Isles through golfing buddies. “We’ve moved a lot between my medical training and his work. St. Simons is our first real home; the first place we’ve felt anchored.

“This is such an awesome area with so many things to do—a lot of good stuff for both the body and the mind.” Melinda’s family, particularly Alex, loves to kayak and ride bikes, as well as take their schnoodle, Lady, on beach walks. “The schools are great. Alex is in seventh grade at Glynn Middle and plays cello in the orchestra.”

They are not only taken with the beauty of coastal Georgia, but also impressed with the large range of cultural offerings. “The live oaks with the Spanish moss have a romantic, gothic feel. Don is always saying, ‘We live in a painting.’ It’s also amazing for such a small area to have so many concerts, music, theatrical performances and art exhibits. The Golden Isles Youth Orchestra is as excellent as is the ballet here. We are trying to expose Alex to cultural things, as well as all the rich history here.”

Dr. Melinda loves practicing pediatrics here. “This is the best place I’ve worked. You get to do more here than in a larger area, so you get a more complete picture of your patients. You get to do it all instead of specializing in one narrow area, so you don’t lose your skill set. It’s more work in a way, but the Health System is a very nice, relaxed place to work. They respect our autonomy as physicians and try to keep things streamlined so we can better care for our patients.”

Melinda said her favorite part is the interaction she has with her young patients, their parents, and sometimes, grandparents. “I like doing detective work to figure out problems, and kids by nature are very optimistic—they can always make you laugh. I learn as much from my patients as they learn from me.”

While Melinda enjoys the Golden Isles “laid back” tendency of most residents, it doesn’t mean local parents are immune from what she calls “the freneticism” of modern society.

“Parents want their children to succeed and do well, but they also want them to enjoy childhood. The questions I get from most are all about balance: ‘How perfect does my kid have to be? How many activities does he or she need to be involved in?’ Our society is all about wanting them to get ahead so early, but really, the time to start academics, or formal education, isn’t until age 7.

You need to read to them like crazy, but what they really need is unstructured play and plenty of sleep. We can’t be there for them every step of the way, so we need to teach them resilience. Let kids fail and learn how to solve problems; it’s all part of being human. We need to give them some space. It’s OK to step back sometimes and be a little lazy,” she said.

Melinda hopes she not only helps her patients stay healthy, but also helps their parents feel less stressed, to enjoy their children. “Every kid is gifted in their own way. It doesn’t have to be academics, or athletics, it can be something such as having a great heart. As parents, we can guide from behind instead of pulling. If we learn to be less competitive and more collaborative, we’ll all be better off.

“We’re so lucky to live somewhere so connected to nature and so perfect a place for letting kids be kids.”



### Up Close:

**Education/Training:** BA in English from Northwestern University; Medical degree from Northwestern University Medical School; Residency: Riley Hospital for Children at Indiana University Health.

**Family Theatrics:** Last Christmas, they performed together in the Golden Isles Arts & Humanities’ production of “A Christmas Carol.” “I still have kids come in the office who recognize me. I was Mrs. Cratchit, Don was Mr. Cratchit and our son was Peter Cratchit.”

**Family Athlete:** “I like to work out, but the only athlete in the family is Lady. At 10-pounds she thinks she can take down any horse we see when walking the beach. She’s a real spitfire.”

**Knit Pick:** “I especially like to knit things for dogs. That’s my dorkiness coming out!”

**I Love to Walk...** along Gould’s Inlet. Neptune Park, Epworth and Jekyll Island are also family favorites.”