In 2004, Saunders traveled to Afghanistan as part of the U.S. Department of Health and Social Services contingent that was working to reduce the very high maternal and infant mortality in that young country. As part of that effort, he helped to teach better medical techniques to attending physicians and residents at a hospital. "I did what I could in a secular Islamic environment," where he says he could not touch a woman's body without her husband present and where many of the female physicians had been kept by the Taliban from putting a finger in a dike. "Our team tried to help bring the Afghan doctors up to Western standards." Previously, in all of Saunders' lifetime as an obstetrician, he never witnessed a maternal death. However, the hospital in Afghanistan averaged four to six maternal deaths per month, and he saw several occur while there. "We did some good - we saved some lives. But it was like putting a finger in a dike."

Outside of the world of medicine, from 1991 to 2003 Saunders was a member of the UW Board of Trustees and was its president from 1995 to 1996. He saw many changes and improvements to UW during his tenure as a trustee. "I spent 12 years working with people who were bright and had a love for the university." He recounts being in that position during difficult times, when the university had little money, and when the trustees made the decision to cut the longstanding UW baseball program. Among the accomplishments of his tenure as a trustee, Saunders counts the new geology and botany facilities, and the institution, for the first time, of admissions requirements for entering students. During his time as a trustee, Saunders was an essential force in the formation of the WYAM1 program, which provides medical teaching curricula and placement opportunities for UW medical students.

"One benefit of the program is that student can attend their first year of medical school in Wyoming and can come together as a class. It is a good transition between undergraduate and graduate school." After students complete that first year together, they then continue experience primary health care in a variety of settings within the five participating states. Phil Dubois, former president of UW and now chancellor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, recalls Saunders' efforts on behalf of a range of entities UW.

"As anyone who knows Jerry would expect, he carried out his responsibilities in a very thorough and thoughtful way. I cannot remember him missing a meeting, even when our famous Wyoming weather was starting to kick up. Indeed, it was not unusual for me to look down the aisle at the basketball games and find Jerry in his seat, even on weekdays or weekends when we did not have a Trustee meeting scheduled. Because of his dedication to the Cowboys, Jerry treated the drive from Sheridan to Laramie like he was going down to the corner grocery store!"

Dubois says, "Perhaps the most significant contribution Jerry made during his time on the Board was his role in the development of the Strategic Plan for Intercollegiate Athletics. Although the Board was deeply divided on some parts of that initiative, Jerry calmly and gently nudged his colleagues to support the plan which, as you know, led to a special legislative appropriation to support both operations and athletic facility improvements."

Saunders explains that although he never placed athletics above academics, he had to do some convincing of his fellow trustees that athletics "was part of the university" and would benefit from a plan, just like the sort that was being developed for academic programs. "We needed to plan for what it would take to be more competitive. I take some ownership for that."

Additionally, he's taken ownership for his education. He showed great promise as a UW undergraduate, being named "Outstanding Freshman Premed Student." He was a member of the Sigma Nu fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Delta pre-med honorary, and Phi Epsilon Phi Sophomore men's honorary. But somewhere between his undergraduate program at UW and his medical training in Colorado, Saunders was unaware he was short one Fine Arts credit. It was in 1995 that Saunders made the discovery and enrolled in a Music Appreciation course through correspondence study. He thus completed his degree in Natural Science and Math from the UW.

As a trustee, he was in the unique position of signing his own diploma. Although he was away in 2004, he has remained in Sheridan where he is at work on a medical novel he hopes to publish one day. He remarried and spends time with his wife Myrna (Robbins) Saunders BA '93 and his three grown daughters, enjoys the Wyoming outdoors, and hunts and fishes with his sons-in-law and grandchildren.

Reflecting on being named a Distinguished Alumnus, Saunders says he feels flattered by a "tremendous honor." He didn't go through his professional life with the idea in mind of being given an award, he says. "When I look at the other names on the list over the years, I feel gratified and humbled."