



PRACTICE PROFILE

DENTAL PRACTICE

Pine Grove Dental Arts
Steamboat Springs, Colorado

Curtis J. Comeau, DDS
Steven W. Diehl, DDS
Bill Schwartz, DDS

OFFICE

Square feet: 3,200
Eight Operatories

OPERATORY EQUIPMENT

- A-dec 511 and Decade Plus 1221 Chairs
- A-dec Central and Rear Treatment Cabinetry
- A-dec 532, 545 and 2122 Delivery Units
- A-dec 6300 Lights
- A-dec 1601 Doctor's Stools
- A-dec 1622 Assistant's Stools
- A-dec W&H Handpieces
- Air Techniques AirStar 70/STS-10 Office Package
- Eaglesoft Practice Management Software
- Midmark M11 Sterilizer
- Schick Digital Sensors
- Schick iPan

This practice is a Patterson Advantage® Gold member.

Rocky Mountain High-End

“He was born in the summer of his 27th year
Comin’ home to a place he’d never been before
He left yesterday behind him, you might say he was born again
You might say he found a key for every door.”

– “Rocky Mountain High,” John Denver



The opening lyrics of John Denver's famous song, "Rocky Mountain High," might have been written just for the doctors who founded Pine Grove Dental Arts in Steamboat Springs, Colo. Dr. Curt Comeau settled in Steamboat when he was 27; Dr. Bill Schwartz is from the Midwest but relocated to the Rockies soon after graduating from dental school; and Dr. Steven Diehl moved his family from the busyness of the city to the quietude of Steamboat's mountains and woods.

As individual dentists, each excelled at patient care and worked hard to get to the top of his field. But when they joined forces to open a general practice together in 2009, the doctors found that they could offer more advanced dentistry and have even more time to enjoy the natural surroundings of their adopted home.

Pioneering Ways

Curtis Comeau, DDS, was the first of the three doctors to set up residency in Steamboat Springs in 1975. The Texas native visited the state as a teenager and never forgot its beauty. After graduating from the University of Texas – Houston, he took the Colorado state boards in anticipation of eventually practicing there.

When he finished his Vietnam Theatre tour of service in 1974, Dr. Comeau returned to Colorado, settled in Steamboat and started his own practice: the precursor to Pine Grove Dental Associates. By 1987, Dr. Comeau, who is a graduate of the Las Vegas Institute cosmetic dentistry program, had expanded his practice and relocated to a larger space.

Bill Schwartz, DDS, was almost as predestined to wind up in Steamboat Springs as he was to become a dentist. His dad and three uncles are dentists and his mom and aunt are dental hygienists. Dr. Schwartz, who is from Eau Claire, Wisc., was an avid downhill skier and ice hockey player who visited cousins in Colorado on his holidays and grew to love the state for its weather, mountains and the lifestyle he envisioned for himself there.

After graduating from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and practicing in the state for several years, Dr. Schwartz moved to Denver, but found that he was driving to the mountains every weekend. When he discovered Steamboat, he fell in love. "Steamboat Springs is different from other ski areas. It's a real community ... it has a real Midwestern feel," he says.

Luck and a practice broker helped Dr. Schwartz connect with Dr. Comeau in 2002. Dr. Schwartz, who enjoys working with CEREC and is trained in implantology, got along so well with Dr. Comeau that in less than two years, he became his partner.

Steven Diehl, DDS, is a Colorado native who left the state to attend Creighton University in Nebraska but then returned home. He owned and operated several dental practices in the Denver area, practicing general dentistry as well as developing a love for performing implants. In 1999, he and his wife sought a quieter place to raise their two children and moved to Steamboat. Dr. Diehl bought Steamboat Dental Group, becoming the sole practitioner with three dental assistants/hygienists. »



At Home in the Mountains

Steamboat Springs is a small community with a population of about 12,000 and a high ratio of dentists to citizens. Drs. Diehl and Schwartz, who are similar in age, met at industry events and became friends through mountain biking and playing golf. They also share similar treatment philosophies and practice goals – primarily, to offer exceptional patient care using the best available equipment and technology.

In 2006, Drs. Comeau and Schwartz were just starting to think about buying or building a new office. Their Patterson Dental Territory Representative Mark Phillips had been meeting with them to discuss the need to support the caliber of dentistry they offered with a practice design and equipment that matched.

They attended a Patterson Dental-sponsored practice design seminar where financing, construction, architectural design and more were discussed. Dr. Comeau, a longtime Patterson Dental customer, says that at the seminar, they met their future architect, Paul Battista, who later connected them to all of the key players essential to bringing the new practice to life. "Before we even started the process of designing and building, Patterson gave us a leg up," Dr. Schwartz says.

Dr. Diehl was also looking for a way to grow his practice, but didn't have the resources to take on such a large project by himself. Dr. Schwartz suggested to his partner that perhaps they should join forces. Dr. Comeau and Dr. Diehl made an effort to get to know each other socially and it appeared to be a good match, so the three doctors agreed to combine practices (see "Becoming Partners" sidebar, page 56).

Over the next 18 months, the doctors searched for a new practice location. They found a space downtown with a beautiful view, but it lacked convenient patient

parking and required steep upfront costs that would delay the purchase of new equipment that the doctors wanted. The doctors returned to Pine Grove Dental Associates where Drs. Comeau and Schwartz practiced in a five-operatory space and took another look at what it had to offer. It was situated in a prime location, across the street from one of the town's two grocery stores, it had a public bus stop in front and it was in a well-maintained building with plenty of parking. It had everything going for it, except space.

The existing practice was about 2,000 square feet, but Battista, the architect they'd kept in touch with since the Patterson seminar, estimated that they'd need at least 3,000 square feet. The doctors convinced their next-door neighbor to move into a different office in the building, which gave them an additional 1,000 square feet to play with. Though they had hoped to buy their practice space, the doctors settled for a long-term lease and decided that they would work in Dr. Diehl's four-operatory practice while the remodel took place.

Taking the Plunge

Finding the right people to create their

dream practice was the doctors' first priority. Once construction began, they wanted to focus on work and relax knowing that the details were being handled by people that they trusted. The first thing they decided was which dental supplier to work with. Both practices had been faithful Patterson customers, but they did their due diligence researching other suppliers in the area. Ultimately, they stuck with Patterson because, Dr. Comeau says, "For service after the sale, we wanted somebody that comes to Steamboat and it didn't take us long to agree that we'd continue to do business with Patterson."

The doctors' equipment specialist, Mike Long, and territory representative, Mark Phillips, seconded the use of Battista, with whom they had worked and who specialized in dental practice design. Battista in turn introduced the doctors to Mendel and Company Construction, a firm he felt was up to the challenge.

Dr. Schwartz, who has an eye for design, wanted to achieve several goals with a new practice design. The current space was 25 years old and had been reconfigured three times; the staff didn't have much of a break area; and the practice aesthetic didn't



convey the high level of dentistry that was being offered. "I had a major goal of bringing the appearance of the office into the 21st century, but I didn't want it to lose its flair in five or seven years," Dr. Schwartz says.

The teams met with the doctors to lay out the new practice, deciding on a flow that alleviates the tight quarters of the old space. The simple square design accommodates a lab and sterilization center, employee break area that doubles as an in-office education center, eight operatories, a consultation room, a doctors' office that all three share and reception and waiting area. One of the operatories functions as a dedicated surgery center so that implants can be placed directly out of the office.

In order to make the best use of the available space, the doctors agreed on a shift-based schedule. Drs. Schwartz and Diehl would vary their office hours, which would keep the busyness level to a minimum while expanding the practice hours to serve more patients.

Late in 2008, the doctors moved into Dr. Diehl's practice space and construction

began with a gutting of the practice, exposing steel beams in the vaulted ceilings. They decided to leave those visible from the hallways; the operatories feature closed ceilings but have a lot of windows. The only major surprise that the team encountered was substandard plumbing that needed to be replaced.

Throughout the process, Long and Phillips were instrumental in facilitating discussion between the doctors and the architect and construction team, mitigating problems and helping to keep everything on schedule.

Optimizing the Operatories

In order to create efficiencies when merging the two practices, the doctors agreed to compromise regarding their equipment and technology preferences. To research all available options, Long and Phillips, along with A-dec, hosted the doctors on a trip to the A-dec headquarters in Newberg, Ore. Dr. Diehl was the only doctor who previously had A-dec in his practice and says that it was nice for his partners to be able to visit the showroom and experience the equipment first-hand.

The doctors selected A-dec 511 and Decade Plus 1221 chairs, A-dec Central and Rear treatment cabinetry and A-dec 532, 545 and 2122 delivery units, and they took advantage of the opportunity to customize with countertops in dark and light slate.

Due to the doctors' shift schedule, the operatories sometimes would be shared, especially by hygiene, so symmetrical design was important. Phillips says that the cabinetry they selected features a place for everything. "Patterson and A-dec were instrumental in helping us make sure that the equipment cabinetry in the operatories would help with the consistency," Dr. Schwartz says.

Phillips helped the doctors select W&H electric handpieces with Schick intraoral cameras. "Of all the new technology we have, I like digital radiography the best," Dr. Comeau says. "You can see something, make it bigger, change the contrast." He also praised the technology's ability to show the patient exactly what the doctor is seeing, which helps increase trust and case acceptance. >>

For more information about
Pine Grove Dental Arts, visit
www.pinegrovedentalarts.com



Rather than buy a brand-new digital X-ray unit, they retrofitted their film-based PLANMECA with the Schick iPan, which allows it to work seamlessly with Schick's intraoral sensors and camera. "In Steamboat, everyone's green," Phillips says. "They had a lot of patients asking about digital and reducing radiation exposure."

One of the biggest changes for the doctors was regarding their practice management software. Dr. Diehl used one system and Drs. Comeau and Schwartz used another. In order for their new digital equipment to most easily "talk" with their computers, Long recommended Eaglesoft practice management software, which works seamlessly with Schick, and the doctors agreed that it would be best to switch everyone to a new software. They also plan to become a paperless practice in the future, and Eaglesoft will easily facilitate that transition.

Finished Product

On April 1, 2009, the newly named Pine Grove Dental Arts opened its doors to the community, and the response has been very positive. When you walk inside, says Phillips, it's a relaxing environment, decorated with earth tones and featuring a fireplace that serves both the waiting and treatment areas. Photos of mountains and the doctors' travels, as well as rocks and art are displayed throughout. "It's a modern and efficient, and very attractive office," Long says.

As for other doctors looking to merge a practice or remodel their space, Dr. Comeau says that success is possible with the right people. "When it comes to design and building, hire people who know what they're doing and get out of the way." Dr. Schwartz seconds Dr. Comeau regarding the importance of the people you work with, including the doctors themselves. "It's good to be with other doctors who are of the same mentality. Our facility is a reflection of that." **PT**



Becoming Partners

Before the doctors went into business together, they built relationships on respect and trust. Dr. Schwartz says that it was important not to hold back anything in the beginning stages. "If you don't feel comfortable or confident that you can discuss your concerns, it won't get any easier when you throw money into the mix."

With the help of a lawyer well-versed in dental practice contracts, Drs. Comeau, Diehl and Schwartz set agreeable terms and mapped out plans for a variety of scenarios, from expansion to buying someone out. For Dr. Comeau, who is in his 60s, the contract also gave him an exit strategy as he nears retirement.

Dr. Diehl says that communication with the others has been key. "If you're merging practices, it can't only be your idea that works. You have to be tolerant of other people's opinions."



From left to right:

Chad Bushman, Mike Long, Dr. Steve Diehl, Dr. Curtis Comeau, Mark Phillips, Dr. Bill Schwartz, Steve Benshoof and Danae Greene

PATTERSON TEAM

- Chad Bushman, *Branch Manager*
- Mark Phillips, *Territory Representative*
- Mike Long, *Equipment Specialist*
- Steven Benshoof, *Service Technician*
- Danae Greene, *Technical Advisor*

