

A Small Practice with a Big Heart

Tony Nizich, DDS, may have the smallest dental practice in Juneau, Alaska, but it's just the right size for his clientele, who demand preventive dentistry and high-quality work from this new dentist.

Located in an office park just a stone's throw from three other dental practices, Nizich Family Dental is thriving in its second year of business. Built on a shoestring budget, using the building's existing floor plan, Patterson Office Designer Bob Pattillo says, "This practice proves that you don't have to spend a fortune on a buildout to make a successful practice."

There's No Place Like Home

Dr. Nizich and his wife, Ginger, both grew up in Juneau. The couple started dating when he was a sophomore and she a junior at Juneau-Douglas High School. Dr. Nizich had always been interested in dentistry, and after high school graduation, the couple both attended the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau, with Dr. Nizich majoring in biology and Ginger becoming increasingly interested in the dental field. After three years, the pair transferred to the University of Alaska Anchorage, where Ginger was accepted to one of 12 seats in Alaska's only dental hygiene program.

In the spring of 2002, Dr. Nizich completed his bachelor's degree and Ginger completed her dental hygiene degree. The couple married that summer and moved to Portland, Oregon, where Dr. Nizich completed his dental degree at Oregon Health and Science University. When he graduated in 2006, they contemplated staying in Portland. However, this husband and wife team knew that their hearts – and their dental practice – belonged at home. "I knew I was always coming back to Juneau," said Dr. Nizich. "Our families live in Juneau and we love boating, fishing, hunting and winter sports."



Flying Solo

Dr. Nizich didn't plan to open a solo practice so soon after graduation. But when he carefully analyzed Juneau's dental market, he determined there was an opportunity for another practice in the town of 30,000. The couple

spent the next four months searching for the right space, eventually purchasing a 900-square-foot-building in a business park. The building had previously been used as a small medical facility and already had two distinct treatment rooms, a front office and a reception area.

After selecting the space, Dr. Nizich's next step was contacting the Patterson Dental Seattle Branch, which serves dentists on Alaska's southeast coast. An in-person first meeting was impractical, due to the fact that Juneau is only accessible by boat or plane, so Pattillo, Dr. Nizich and Ginger discussed equipment and technology options over phone and e-mail. Pattillo then flew to Juneau to finalize the details.



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Dr. Nizich relied heavily on Ginger's dental expertise and experience to help guide their decisions. The Nizichs also received help from Dr. Nizich's mother, who filled in as a receptionist, and his father, who had a full-time job, but worked on weekends and evenings helping Dr. Nizich with construction, electrical and plumbing work on the building.

Dr. Nizich and Ginger worked tirelessly the first year, averaging five 12-hour days per week. Ginger assisted Dr. Nizich in the operatory the first year, and also performed cleanings in the hygiene room. After the birth of their first child last April, Nizich Family Dental pared down to a four-day workweek and Ginger scaled back her involvement to one day a week of dental hygiene. At the same time, they hired a full-time dental assistant and a part-time hygienist. "Ginger is a huge asset to the practice," said Dr. Nizich. "I couldn't have done this without her."

Technology Meets Nature

To maximize Dr. Nizich's resources, Pattillo designed the new practice around the existing floor plan. This money-saving move allowed Dr. Nizich to direct his investments toward practice-building equipment and technology.



A-dec chairs, cabinetry, lights and delivery units were chosen for their durability and ease-of-use. Dr. Nizich selected the latest digital X-ray solutions, including Schick digital sensors, Sirona XG3 panoramic X-ray and Progeny Preva DC intraoral X-ray, for enhanced imaging capabilities. Flat-screen monitors at the end of each dental chair allow patients to view their images instantly. Patterson EagleSoft software, which Ginger used in other practices for four years, integrates seamlessly with Schick.

The Nizichs made sure to bring nature into the technologically advanced practice. Located just five miles from the mammoth Mendenhall Glacier, Nizich Family Dental's rustic wood exterior blends seamlessly into the beautiful landscape.

Inside, a cozy color scheme of cream and tan sets off the office's black A-dec chairs and dark granite countertops. Cherry cabinets and wood floors infuse the space with warmth. Paintings of Alaskan scenery decorate the walls and pay tribute to the state's unique history. The result is a state-of-the-art practice with a hometown feel. "We want people to think it's a nice place, but we don't want them to think it's overdone, either," said Dr. Nizich.



Start Out Small

Two years after opening its doors, Nizich Family Dental is already outgrowing its current space. With Patterson's help, Dr. Nizich hopes to expand to four operatories within the year. "He's been tremendously successful, even with the recession," said Pattillo. "He treats people really well and is well-liked in Juneau."

For doctors fresh out of college, Dr. Nizich offers seasoned guidance: "Start out conservative in size if possible. Don't outdo yourself right from the front end, especially if you have zero patient flow. It will make a big difference in your level of success." **PT**