

A Reason for Smiles

Pediatric practice brings care to an area that didn't always have it

Practice Profile

DENTAL PRACTICE
Pediatric Smiles
Jacksonville, Fla.

Staci Suggs, DDS
Tanya Wall, DDS

OFFICE
Square feet: 7,200
12 operatories

EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

- A-dec 1601 Doctor's Stools
- A-dec 1622 Assistant's Stools
- A-dec 311 Dental Chairs
- A-dec 332 Delivery Systems
- A-dec 511 Dental Chairs
- A-dec 545 Assistant's Instrumentation
- A-dec Central Cabinets
- A-dec Dental Lights
- A-dec Treatment Consoles
- Air Techniques AirStar 70 Compressor
- CAESY Patient Education Software
- Eaglesoft Practice Management Software
- Midmark M11 Autoclave
- Miele G7881 Dental Washer
- PLANMECA Intraoral X-Rays
- Porter MXR Flowmeters
- RAMVAC Bison 3 Dry Vac
- Schick Elite Sensors





As a child growing up on the north side of Jacksonville, Fla., Staci Suggs, DDS, remembers long drives across town as her mother hunted out a pediatric dentist for her. There was not a pediatric dentist located in north Jacksonville.

A fascination with dentistry from early on in life combined with the memory of how difficult it was to visit a pediatric dentist as a child perhaps foretold what Suggs would end up doing as a career: opening a pediatric dental practice in her old Jacksonville neighborhood. "My commitment to this area is very personal," said Suggs. "This is where I grew up, and I have always known there was a need in this area. As I completed dental school and began residency, that thought continued to resonate, this is definitely what I eventually wanted to do, and this is where I wanted to do it."

Pediatric Smiles, in its first rendition, opened on Dunn Avenue in north Jacksonville in 2001, with Suggs and Tanya Wall, DDS, at the helm.

The birth of a practice

The two doctors knew of one another while attending separate dental schools in the Washington, D.C., area – Wall was at Howard University and Suggs at the University of Maryland – but grew closer

when they were partnered during their residency. Wall served as a student mentor to Suggs, who was a year behind in the program, and the rest was history. "It seemed like we always got paired together," Suggs said. "Then, after our residency, Tanya moved to Jacksonville before I did. When I moved back, we worked for the same company. I just followed her everywhere!"

It was somewhat coincidental that Wall, who is from North Carolina originally, started practicing in Suggs' hometown. That bit of happenstance, though, proved fortunate for the two and set the stage for what would become Pediatric Smiles. In 2001, the two decided to start their own practice in their free time. "We bought the practice from our mentor, Dr. Phillis Varnado, and worked there on Fridays and Saturdays after working for a dental company four days a week," Wall said. "Every dime of the money that we made, we put back into the practice for three years. Then, in 2004, we changed the name of the office that we started to Pediatric Smiles and went full time."

Going full time meant a new space for Pediatric Smiles would be needed. Looking back, the two doctors admit they didn't really know where to begin when it came to designing, constructing and furnishing a space. Enter Ginger Harris, the Patterson >>



territory representative they started working with in 2001. "She has been absolutely invaluable," Wall said. "We didn't know anything. She was our designer, our project manager, our interior decorator, everything. If it was not for her, we really would have had a hard time even getting started. She has been a tremendous help from every aspect, and there's really nothing she will not do for us."

In 2004, the practice would move again to a new location on Dunn Avenue to accommodate growth, and again Suggs and Wall credited Harris for being instrumental in the move. Pediatric Smiles stayed in that space, which was leased, for about eight years. In the meantime, Suggs and Wall also built an office on the south side of Jacksonville. Continued growth at the Dunn Avenue location made them want to do more.

"We wanted to build something that would add beauty to this area," Wall said. "Something that would make a statement and be a landmark building for Dunn Avenue. This area is so important to us, and we imagined a building that would add beauty and sophistication and truly be a community asset."

For the sake of their patients' convenience, the doctors knew they didn't want the practice to move very far. Little did they know, it would ultimately only be moving across the street. After a year-long search for the perfect location, they inquired about the vacant lot across the street from their current practice. Sure enough, it ended up being just right. "We needed a space big enough that we could potentially bring in specialties in the future," Wall said. "We were worried we would have to conform to building standards, but it really just sort of fell in our laps that the space was literally across the street."

The entire process of constructing the new office was exciting for the doctors, as it wasn't just moving into a new building on Dunn Avenue. This time they were building their own. Harris said she saw a special spark from the doctors as they moved closer to their dream office.

"This one was their baby," Harris said. "They had leased before, but this was going to be one they had forever. They wanted to do it right. From the very beginning, we knew this was going to be a complete joy."

A colorful, functional office

One of the goals of pediatric practices, and one of the biggest reasons Suggs and Wall love what they do, is educating and preparing children for lifelong oral hygiene. With that in mind, Suggs and Wall designed an office that would appeal to all ages of children, not just young ones.

"We didn't want the traditional pediatric office with lots of murals and lots of cartoon characters," Suggs said. "We didn't want to limit the age of patients. Sometimes older kids are more mature and not as comfortable in that environment. So we used color to appeal to everyone. Our goal is for kids and young adults to come here until they graduate from college and move on to their adult life."

The practice is dripping with color, from the walls and desks to a series of colored dots encouraging patients to hop down the hallway on their way to the operatory. In addition to color, the office design also focuses on natural light, with an entire wall of windows in the reception area. Suggs said the design was inspired by another building they saw, which the doctors then adapted to fit their needs and their space. "It's very contemporary, with bright colors everywhere, but it's not so contemporary that it's not comfortable," she said. "We have straight lines, we have curved lines. It's like walking into a Crayola store. That's sort of what we did with it. It's a color explosion."

Suggs and Wall decided on a U-shaped floor design to strike a balance between openness and privacy, while still enabling patient flow. An A-dec Educational Experience at A-dec headquarters in Newberg, Ore., gave them a chance to view different operatory spaces and choose the best fit for their practice. "We had a semi-open bay design in two of our offices, and we found there was a lack of privacy in discussing certain issues with our parents," Wall said. "With this design, there's nice high ceilings and still open access to the operatories, but we also have privacy. We used the cabinetry to help maintain a sense of privacy. It's essentially one large room, but it's separated. It just feels so much more comfortable for everyone."

The floor plan is also open enough that children can see other children getting treated, which can have a calming effect. Every >>



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– Staci Suggs, DDS



conceivable angle was considered in establishing the floor plan, which Suggs said was easier due to the doctors' experience in moving practices. "It's the third office we've built," she said. "So, it's just like with a home. By the time you get to your third house, you know exactly what you want."

The sterilization center is a big change for Pediatric Smiles. What was previously just a sterilization counter is now a fully functional sterilization center, the doctors said. Patterson Equipment Specialist John Weidenaar helped the doctors strike a compromise between what they dreamed of and what they budgeted for, and the results were noticeable immediately. "It's so easy to access. It's highly functional and very efficient," Wall said. "We're able to turn over our instruments quickly, and it's been a breath of fresh air working with that every day."

Outside the front doors of the practice, a cheerful sea turtle greets patients. Named Tanya, after Wall, the turtle is a symbol of what Pediatric Smiles is all about: becoming a happy, colorful destination along Dunn Avenue. The results have been undeniable. "Our office has been our most effective marketing tool," Wall said. "When we did our marketing analysis, the building alone brought in the highest number of patients. People did not even know that we were on Dunn Avenue, even though we were there over six years. Now, there's no mistaking that Pediatric Smiles is here!"

While the practice has been effective at bringing in new patients, it's also ensured that their longtime patients still have access to the specialized pediatric dental care that Suggs had wanted to establish since dental school, and that's the most important part.

"We've had patients who've been with us since 2001, who've seen us grow from our 1,200-square-foot office to this huge office," Wall said. "They are just as happy as we are and they love the new office. They love everything. So do we." **PT**

To learn more about Pediatric Smiles, visit www.pediatricsmiles.com.



To watch a video of Pediatric Smiles, scan this QR code with your smartphone.

If you don't have a QR code reader on your phone, there are free apps available for download. Once you've got your free app, point your phone's camera at the QR Code and you'll be taken to the video!



PATTERSON TEAM

Eric Hanson, *Branch Manager*

Ginger Harris, *Territory Representative*

John Weidenaar, *Equipment Specialist*

Bill Ruhland, *Service Technician*

Chad Harding, *Office Designer*

From left to right:
Bill Ruhland, Eric Hanson, Staci Suggs, DDS,
Ginger Harris, Tanya Wall, DDS,
John Weidenaar and Chad Harding



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