

DOCTOR *of* DENTISTRY

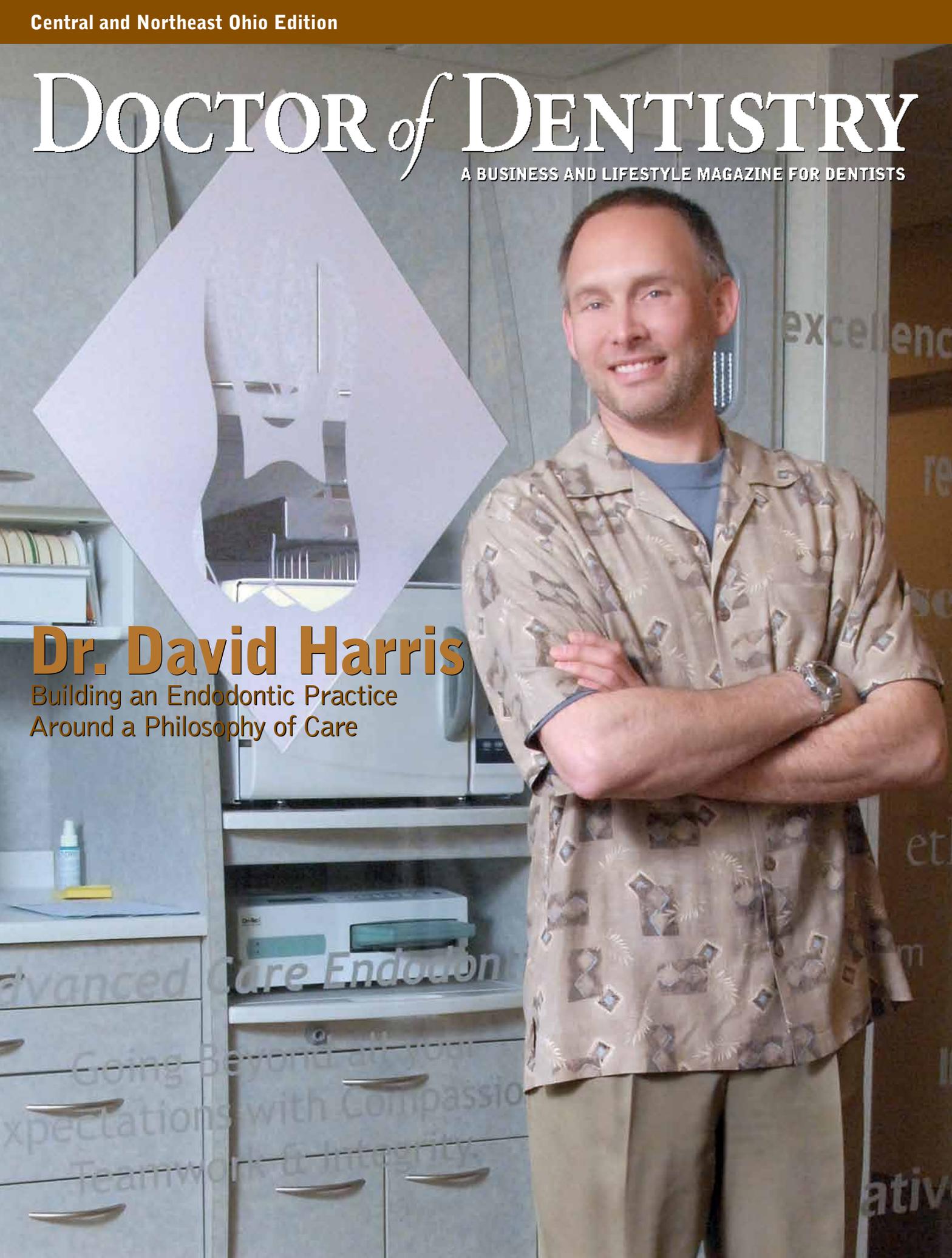
A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR DENTISTS

Dr. David Harris

Building an Endodontic Practice
Around a Philosophy of Care

Advanced Care Endodontics
Going Beyond all your
expectations with Compassion
Teamwork & Integrity

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Building an Endodontic Practice Around a Philosophy of Care

By Vivian Wagner

INHERITING A PHILOSOPHY

Dr. David Harris remembers standing in the doorway of an operating room, watching his father during an oral surgery procedure. The young Indiana boy was amazed by not only the precision and technique involved in the oral surgery, but also by how comfortable and relaxed his father made his patients feel.

“It was never a traumatic experience for any of them,” he said.

Inspired by his father’s practice and by his mother who worked as a dental hygienist, David set his heart on becoming a dentist.

He studied biology at Indiana University, married his college sweetheart, Wendy, in 1989, and then went to dental school at Case Western Reserve University. There, he earned his dental degree in 1992, completed an internship in advanced educational general dentistry in 1993, and earned his doctorate in endodontics in 1995.

David started his practice in Stow, OH, in 1995, with Wendy as his office manager.

“We had an ideal of treating everyone — referring doctor, patient and staff — like we wanted to be treated ourselves. It’s about doing everything you can do to meet that high standard of care,” Dr. Harris said. “From there, we built our practice on constantly resetting the bar for that care.”

GOING SOLO

Dr. Harris recently moved from a partnership to a solo practice in downtown Stow. He’s carefully cultivating an environment that fully exemplifies his philosophy of patient care.

“When you are committed to an ideal, it’s too hard to evolve your performance when you have many people involved in the decision-making

The mission of Dr. David Harris and his team at Advanced Care Endodontics is to change the way people feel about root canal treatment.

process. It’s my vision that guides the practice now.”

The experience of starting over was one that Dr. Harris and his staff could write a book about and would love to share with anyone who is interested.

“There are many things that you think you know since you’ve already opened a practice once. There was much I had forgotten and many things I had to learn the hard way.”

The Advanced Care Endodontics team had an ideal about where they were going and how they were going to get there, but the daily dynamics were often not what they had anticipated. “You really have to love what you are doing and who you are doing it for to have the motivation to want to open a new practice after you’ve already established a practice.” Here are some of the things that Dr. Harris and his team learned about the process of starting over or starting a practice the first time:

1. Plan for the growth of your practice; you will lower your probability of having to do it over again. It is worth paying for the extra space because if your goal is to grow, you then have the ability to do it.
2. Hire skilled employees that are flexible about what they are willing to do, and make sure that these people have the same values as you do. Treat those people with dignity and respect and extend it in the level of benefits you provide for them.

“When you show your team that they are meaningful to you and that you could not do what you do without them, you create a loyal relationship that goes both ways,” Dr. Harris stated. “They are there for you when you have to go through the hard stuff and I am grateful to them.”

3. Create an office plan that is convenient and stress-free for your patients and staff, as well as one that has a warm and relaxing atmosphere.

“When you are in an environment almost as much as you are in your home, you want to enjoy yourself,” said Sylvia Johnson, Dr. Harris’ veteran employee of 12 years. Sylvia, like all of the Advanced Care Endodontic team, helped Dr. Harris plan the space using her experience of the office. Creating a stress-free space means thinking about everything from ease of transfer in and out of the treatment room, to the ease of entering and exiting the parking lot.

Dr. Harris stated, “One of the reasons we chose our office location is that there are three exits on three roads, so our patients will never have to cross two lanes of traffic going left.”

4. Research and seek references for the contractors and vendors you choose. Look for *service providers* that have the necessary expertise to guide you through the process and that do all of the legwork for you.

“For example,” says Wendy, “when we chose our contractor, we picked the one who arrived prepared to give a professional quote. The open, friendly atmosphere we created is a tribute to the work done by Dental Office by Design, owned by Bill Miller of W.J.





The atmosphere in Dr. Harris's new office is warm and relaxing for patients and staff. (From l to r, Wendy Harris, Jennifer Sturgeon, Kelly Segedy and Terri Catalano (patient) at the counter)

Miller Builders, and by Diane Miller, who heads up the interior design department. Bill, and his son, Michael, walked in with confidence, dressed in professional uniforms and were prepared to give a competent quote. We received an expected completion time of 10 weeks when other contractors told us it was impossible. In fact, the Miller team was able to complete the original contractual work with many add-ons in only nine weeks! We would recommend them to anyone."

5. Remember that opening day is not the finish line. There will still be things that need to be worked out by vendors and others that you hired, which may not become apparent until you are operational. "Everyone tells you to get everything in writing. Many of the stressful moments would have been eliminated had we truly followed that advice," states Dr. Harris.
6. Know that you need to be a risk taker. With today's technology and pace, you will have to operate outside your comfort zone. Just "keep on, keepin' on," explains Wendy.
7. Don't lose sight of the fact that you own a small business and that you are an entrepreneur. Dr. Harris and his staff try to maintain that feeling of putting their signature on the atmosphere they created in order to keep their focus and vision.
8. Work with people that have the same vision as you do, and do whatever it takes to maintain a "win-win" partnership with them. "We enjoy a great working relationship with our referring doctors and their staff because we try to do things the way that *they* would do them. We work as a team with each patient's general dentist because we appreciate and are honored that they have entrusted us with the care of their patients," Diane Ohman, an 11-year veteran of Dr. Harris' practice, said.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Over the last 15 years, Dr. Harris has developed expertise in both root canal therapy and what it takes to minimize the fears that people have when they need one. The fact is that people don't like to have root canal treatment. There is a common misperception out there that it is a painful and traumatic experience.

Dr. Harris is not the kind of endodontist you are afraid to visit. He and his team go beyond to make sure patients feel comfortable. Dr. Harris has taken many continuing education classes in order to

minimize the pain of injections, and the patient can stop the treatment at anytime simply by raising his or her hand.

"We treat people right and listen to what they are telling us," said Emily Allen, a team member who has been with Dr. Harris for three years. "We want each patient to have a great experience and tell everyone that it is not that bad to have root canal treatment."

From the evaluation and assessment to the procedure itself, which involves cleaning and removing dead or dying nerve tissue, shaping and sterilizing the canals, and filling them with gutta percha, patients are told what is happening to them every step of the way.

"He takes the time to answer questions thoroughly so that the patient feels reassured," Wendy said of Dr. Harris. "Patients feel very safe, and amazingly, a large percentage of them fall asleep during the procedure."

COMPASSION IS KEY

Patients offer the best testimony for any dentist, and Dr. Harris has plenty of positive feedback. Doug Klicman of Rootstown, for instance, went to Dr. Harris for root canal treatment, and he was pleased with the care he received.

"Dr. Harris made me feel very comfortable, and he kept me very informed about the procedure and what would happen."

Doug especially appreciated the kindness and caring of the staff.

"They were wonderful," Doug said. "I had a very nice rapport with them."

Terri Catalano of Stow echoes Doug's sentiments. She went to Dr. Harris for a root canal treatment in April 2009, and she said her visit changed her view of root canal therapy.

"I'm a person that doesn't like to go to the dentist, but they made me feel very at ease here," said Terri. "The people were very friendly. They explained everything that was going to happen. It went without any glitches."

STATE-OF-THE-ART PRACTICE

Endodontics is a specialty that requires knowledge of the latest research and equipment in order to ensure a predictable outcome.

"We carefully planned this practice to operate at a 2010

Twelve-year employee Sylvia Johnson (front) and Jessica Seckler are delighted with the new office.



standard-of-care level, and we can easily adapt to new technology,” Dr. Harris said.

Each room has a state-of-the-art microscope, used for documenting and examining canals. These microscopes are connected to cameras and goggles used before, during and after treatment. The patient can watch the procedure on the video screen if they desire. Dr. Harris also uses digital imaging to minimize the patient’s exposure to radiation, and a laser to assist with the sterile isolation of the tooth. In addition, he invested in electric dental engines so that the sound associated with dental drilling is greatly diminished.

Another tool the Advanced Care Endodontic team uses to increase office efficiency and patient satisfaction resides at the front desk. Remote Lite developed by Renaissance System and Services (RSS) is an electronic claims submission system that transmits claims from the dental office to the insurance companies for faster turnaround. Jennifer Sturgeon, a three-year team member that specializes in reception and billing, says that she’s happy that the office uses RSS.

“It’s great, she said. “It’s quick, easy and efficient. The system works better than the system we’ve used in the past because it’s reliable, the reports are helpful and the company’s customer service is exceptional.”

TRUSTED REFERRALS

Dr. Harris realizes that referrals are the lifeblood of any specialty.

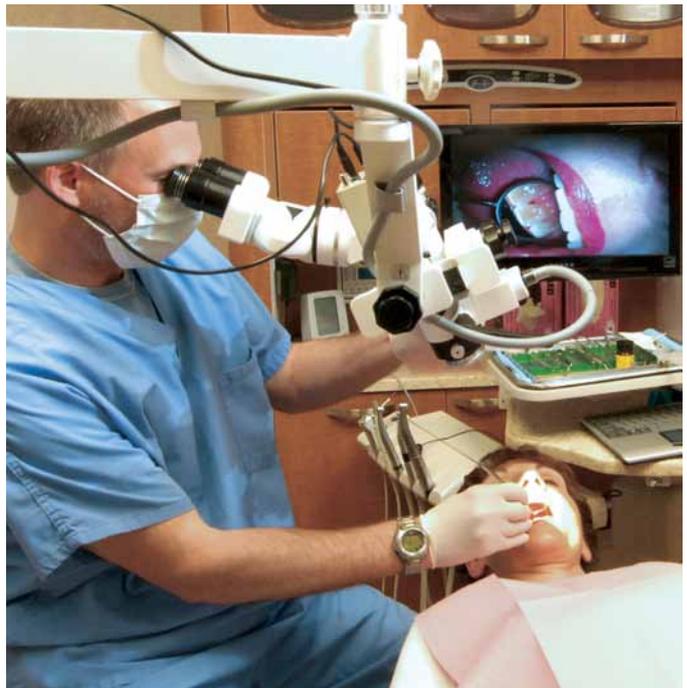
“We strive to gain and keep the trust of the referring dentist, their staff and their patients,” said Dr. Harris.

Dr. Andrea Folatko, a general dentist in Cuyahoga Falls, has been sending her patients to Dr. Harris for several years.

“In addition to being an extremely talented endodontist, Dr. Harris is one of a kind. His outstanding treatment includes prompt appointments, a comfortable chairside demeanor and outstanding postoperative communication with both the patient and the referring doctor. He is consistently able to get my patients appointed within one or two days, which they truly appreciate. Dr. Harris and his entire staff are exceptionally friendly as well as highly trained. I proudly refer my patients to him because he pays particular attention to maintaining a high standard of care.”

For the past 15 years, Dr. John Kline of Akron, OH, has also referred patients to Dr. Harris for his exceptional care. “Dr. Harris has a great demeanor with patients. He smiles all the time, he’s gentle and highly skilled at root canal treatment.”

At Advanced Care Endodontics, staff and patients are treated like family. (Standing from left to right: Diane Ohman, Sylvia Johnson, Kelley Segedy, Wendy Harris and Jennifer Sturgeon. Seated from left to right: Emily Allen, Dr. David Harris and Jessica Seckler)



“We carefully planned this practice to operate at a 2010 standard-of-care level, and we can easily adapt to new technology,” Dr. Harris said.

TREATING STAFF AND PATIENTS LIKE FAMILY

One of the hallmarks of the Harris practice is the harmony between its team members.

“I am very proud of my team,” he said. “Many have been with me since the beginning. I love to connect and have fun with them. We enjoy going to dental meetings and improving our skills. I trust them and they all work very hard to provide that positive experience from the time the patient calls to the time we call to check on them after their treatment.”

Jessica Seckler, who has worked with Dr. Harris for five years, stated, “It’s easy to treat every patient like family because that is how we are treated. I love this job!”

The mission of the Advanced Care Endodontics team is to change the way people feel about root canal treatment.

Along with the rest of the team, Diane Ohman, who specializes in marketing for the practice, helped to create and expand the practice philosophy.

“Once I learned what was going on with this office, I couldn’t wait to talk about it with the referring practices,” said Diane. “The culture here feels like family. Dr. Harris really respects our ideas and utilizes our input. Our whole team has enjoyed working together to create this endodontic practice, with a philosophy of care.”

A WORD OF GRATITUDE

A special thanks should be extended to equipment sales specialist Bob Bauer and Parma dentist Dr. John G. Murphy. “Bob introduced me to Dr. Murphy who generously opened his office to me on several occasions. Dr. Murphy shared his recently completed build-out experience with me, confirmed my decision to use Pelton & Crane equipment, and affirmed my commitment to a paperless conversion,” Dr. Harris said. “In addition, I’d like to thank all the dental offices who supported and trusted us with their patients during our transition period.” ■



PHOTOS BY DENNY VALENTINE