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February 2012

Live Life Smiling

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has balanced work,
play, and giving back
to his community*

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Live Life Smiling

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Practice Profile | Anil J. Idiculla, DMD

Practice Names: Park Meadows Orthodontics (Lone Tree, Colo); Metropolitan Orthodontics (Downtown Denver); Beaver Creek Orthodontics (Edwards, Colo)

Office square footage: 2,100 to 3,600

Number of chairs: Park Meadows 7, Metropolitan 5, Beaver Creek 3

Years in Practice: Graduated in 2006, started Park Meadows in 2008, Metropolitan in 2009, and Beaver Creek in 2010

Education: The University of Pennsylvania (college and residency), Nova Southeastern University (dental school)

Average Patients Per Day: 65

Starts per year: 505

Days worked per week: 3

Top five products used: RMO Synergy-R Bracket and Indirect Bonding System (RMBond), Invisalign (adult and teen), Dolphin Imaging/Management/Mobile/Aquarium, Opal Valo curing lights and Opal Seal, Hummingbird Associates (Karen Moawad), and Civitas Architects (Agnes Kan)

Web sites: live-life-smiling.com; facebook.com/dr.idiculla

Almost 6 years ago, Philadelphia native Anil J. Idiculla, DMD, came to Denver with his freshly minted orthodontic degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He was looking for a place to call home and to start his career, but he found much more: a community and a place to, as he puts it, “live life smiling.”

Coming to Denver on the recommendations of friends who had raved about the quality of life there, Idiculla started his career in the office of a prosthodontist, doing in-house orthodontics 2 to 3 days a month. From there, he added orthodontic gigs at general dental offices. The work eventually snowballed, and he found himself working in 13 different offices across Colorado at one point. Despite the chaos, Idiculla was grateful for the work. As a new graduate, he knew work could be hard to find. But more importantly, he learned a valuable lesson from it and figured out what his dream was: to open his own orthodontic practice.

According to Idiculla, the experience of working at so many different offices in so many different parts of the state helped him visualize his dream—from his treatment-planning philosophy to the perfect location to the right team members—and helps him appreciate what he has since achieved.

Building from the Ground Up

Idiculla had thought he would partner with a local orthodontist to build a practice together, but when no one was ready to add him to their existing team, his impatience got the better of him, and he struck out on his own. His first practice started out within his best friend’s general dental office in the Park Meadows area of Lone Tree, Colo, but once it proved successful, he started looking for land to build his own office.

“I remember taking a look at the land where the building wasn’t even built, wearing a hard hat, climbing up a ladder, and hopping on the concrete that lies under my current floor. There were no walls, no ceiling, nothing. All I did was look out at the view. And looking across all the homes toward the beautiful Rocky Mountains with the listing realtor, I said, ‘I’ll buy this office and make it happen,’ ” he recalls.

Eleven months later, in August 2008, that office had its first clinical day. By January of 2009, he had added a second office in downtown Denver, making him the only orthodontist in the downtown area. The urban location lets Idiculla hold on to his city roots. “I’m a city guy from Philadelphia. So one of my passions is to always be in the middle of the action,” he says.

His expansion continued in January 2010, when he opened the Beaver Creek branch of his practice, some 100-plus miles from his first two locations. According to Idiculla, it was the right place and opportunity to build an office—and the fact that its proximity to the best skiing in Colorado gives Idiculla plenty of “powder day” opportunities in his downtime doesn’t hurt.

Living Life

While juggling three offices may seem chaotic, Idiculla has found a work-life balance that allows him to do what he loves and live a life that he loves, all in keeping with his practice’s motto and mantra, “Live Life Smiling.” Working between 10 and 11 clinical days a month, he takes the time to enjoy the active lifestyle that the Denver area affords, with activities including running, skiing, snowshoeing, and bike riding.

“On my free days, I want to live,” he says. “I want to take advantage of the wonderful city I’m in. If I were back in Philadelphia, I would probably work more days, especially in the winter. It’s just a Denver mind-set.”

To keep his practice running smoothly, Idiculla relies on his eight-member traveling staff, which includes financial, scheduling, marketing, and patient coordinators, as well as a community liaison and three chairside/orthodontic assistants. He has also chosen office systems that help him maintain his work-life balance and his sanity, all while starting 40 to 50 patients a month.



Idiculla stresses branding as the key to the growth of his practice.

“It’s not a matter of being overstaffed or having a huge facility,” he says. “It’s a matter of having a team that is running on all cylinders on the days we are there and the days I am not there.” He adds, “I am probably only in the office doing administrative work one additional half-day in addition to my clinical days, and that is all due to the systems in place and due to the team just being very efficient.”

Idiculla credits his practice consultant, Karen Moawad from Hummingbird Associates, with helping him implement the right internal and external systems to keep the practice running smoothly and efficiently. From scheduling and patient communication tools to internal communication tools, Moawad has kept Idiculla and his staff from “getting bogged down in paperwork and e-mails to each other,” he says.

Among Idiculla’s most prized system choices for his practice is Dolphin Imaging and Management Solutions. He says, “All of the Dolphin tools have been unbelievable, really just seamless. If you’re looking at a strict purchase, that’s been the best purchase I’ve ever made.”

On the personnel side, the fact that members of his team have been with him since the beginning has created a bond among the team that has created both a positive work environment and a successful practice.

“The struggle of a start-up and building these practices in the middle of major areas with tons of competition has really brought the team close together, much as it would a sports team that finds victory in the face of potential adversity,” Idiculla says. “There’s an inner bond in my team that can’t be duplicated again. So it’s something pretty special. I want my team to feel like it *is* our practice.”

Creating a Community

To expand that “inner bond” to the communities his practice serves, Idiculla and his team have made community involvement a practice hallmark. Last year, the practice treated more than 82 patients for free. Many of those patients came to the practice through his partnership with three Colorado-based nonprofits: The

Colorado Orthodontic Foundation, whose mission is to provide affordable orthodontic treatment and education to as many financially challenged children and families as possible; Judi’s House, which offers bereavement support to children; and Kids in Need of Dentistry (KIND), which provides dental care to children in need.

“That is a mission we’ve undertaken in our own office to give back to the community. We never want to turn anyone away due to financial circumstances,” Idiculla says. “Ever since I [got involved with these organizations], it was pretty apparent to [me and my team] how many children in the area can hardly afford orthodontics. So we wanted to be a solution to that.”

Idiculla’s commitment to those in need stems from the loss of his father when he was 4 years old. While his mother, a physician, had a job that could support Idiculla and his brother and sister, he learned not to take for granted the fact that his mother had a job that allowed him to get orthodontics when he was a child.

“I want to make sure no child has to not get or wait to get orthodontics until they are an adult. I want to make sure no child has to be ashamed or have it affect their lives. When it comes to children needing orthodontics, we [the practice] take a very active role in our community,” Idiculla says.

That commitment to the community and children, along with the focus of Karen Moawad, once again, has grown into the practice’s Partners in Education program. For every new patient that starts treatment, the practice donates \$50 to the patient’s school in the patient’s name. Since the program started in November 2008, the practice has given more than \$40,000 to local schools.

Idiculla says, “It’s been pretty great to see school responses. Initially, schools are taken aback, but it’s been great to see what they have done with this money. It’s a drop in the bucket, but we feel like we’re connecting to schools and the neighborhood as well. We’re not just putting on braces and straightening teeth. We’re trying to make a small difference in our world.”



Idiculla’s traveling staff includes financial, scheduling, marketing, and patient coordinators; three chairside assistants; and a community liaison.



*Idiculla starts
more than
15 Invisalign
cases each
month.*

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The program is done unannounced, so that a lot of parents don't know about it when they bring their child in for treatment. Once they do find out, though, they are pleasantly surprised.

"Some parents and teachers are very excited about it and want to spread the word, which is great, but it's been a very fun way to get involved in our patients' lives, to get to know them, and to make little communities within schools," Idiculla says.

His practice's commitment to community involvement includes an on-staff community liaison that runs the practice's Partners in Education program and leads the different fund-raisers the practice undertakes to help kids in need. In addition, she helps keep the practice engaged with the community through Facebook and Twitter.

Idiculla also finds time to serve on several Colorado-based boards, including the Colorado Summer Orthodontic Meeting, the Colorado Orthodontic Association, and the Metropolitan Denver Dental Society.

Distinguishing Yourself

Idiculla also keeps orthodontic residents in mind as he looks for ways to give back. Knowing firsthand the uncertainty they face in a challenging employment market, Idiculla wants to spread the message that there is hope.



Idiculla has built three offices during his 6-year career.

"I never would have thought 3 years into my practice that we would be starting close to 500 patients in a year, that I would be an Invisalign Elite level provider, that I would have three offices. This is just what happened with belief and heart and a team that is at the top of their game," says Idiculla, who starts more than 15 Invisalign cases each month.

He warns new orthodontists who worry about a possible glut in the field that to stay competitive they must distinguish themselves. While confidence and connections will help, the key, Idiculla says, is branding themselves and their practices uniquely.

For Idiculla, successfully branding his practice has been



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key to its continued growth. While his practice has run some print ads to let people know who they are and what they are about, they have avoided relying on gimmicks or discount offers to bring in patients. Instead, taking a cue from successful large companies, the focus has been on a consistent image and brand.

“Marketing is tied so closely to branding that you have to have a great and consistent brand. Getting everything consolidated might sound elementary to these practices that have things rolling, but just getting a logo, a letterhead, and an envelope—everything you send out—consistent is so painstakingly difficult, yet so crucial. We are not a huge company, but you have to model yourselves after these big companies for success,” he says.

To get this message across, Idiculla has found time to lecture across the country and in Canada, Australia, Bali, and Brazil. He talks to fellow orthodontists and orthodontic residents on clinical efficiency, practice management, branding and marketing, and, most importantly, “building the practice of your dreams.”

“My goal is to show other orthodontists and orthodontic residents what we’re doing and how it works for us,”

Idiculla says. “I want to help others live life smiling and really enjoy life, whether it means working fewer days or inspiring a team.”

While Idiculla has found fulfillment in being able to establish his own vision and to create a practice staffed by team players, the job is hardly over.

“There is a lot more to do. But it’s a matter of doing what’s right and not just creating another office to create another office. We’re always evaluating that and looking for the right ways to do that and ways that we can improve,” he says. “I think we can easily triple or quadruple our number, not only team members, but of patients that we can bring this new vision to. Eventually, we’ll be bringing on another doctor to be part of our team, which will be very exciting, as well as adding different strategic locations.”

In the meantime, Idiculla is grateful for the life that orthodontics has afforded him. “This profession awards so many people with an amazing lifestyle to live,” he says. “And I’m here to live life smiling.” **OP**

Alison Werner is the associate editor of Orthodontic Products. She can be reached at awerner@allied360.com.



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