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Experience Is Everything

Led by **Dr. Daniel Cassarella, DCO Orthodontic Specialists** aspires to leave a lasting, positive impact on the lives of patients and other members of the community. *by BILL DONAHUE | photography by JODY ROBINSON*

Daniel Cassarella, D.M.D., M.S., has spent most of his adult life perfecting the imperfect. As the founder of DCO Orthodontic Specialists in Worcester, Dr. Cassarella considers it his privilege and responsibility to make a difference in the lives of others—and he's doing so in ways that go far beyond his gift for creating head-turning smiles for patients of all ages.

"As a practice, we focus on two things: helping patients and uplifting the community," says Dr. Cassarella, a board-certified orthodontist who received his undergraduate degree from Penn State, earned his dental degree from the Harvard School of Dental Medicine, and completed his orthodontics residency through the UCLA School of Dentistry. "The main reason I started my own practice from the ground up is

that I wanted to create a patient experience unlike any other. Each patient is an individual, and we treat each patient as if they are at the center of everything we do."

This commitment is epitomized by the practice's carefully crafted mission statement: To partner with our patients to create a personalized treatment experience that encourages them to reach, aspire, represent, and distinguish themselves as who they are and who they strive to become.

"Yes, giving each patient a beautiful smile that expresses confidence is certainly part of the equation, but what we're doing here is much broader than that," Dr. Cassarella adds. "We want to be fully engaged with patients, their families, and other members of the community as a way to help others realize their full

potential."

The patient-first, community-centric approach has helped DCO Orthodontic Specialists experience steady and significant growth since opening its doors in August of 2016. The practice offers multiple treatment alternatives, including traditional metal braces, clear braces, and specialized Invisalign options, with each patient receiving the most appropriate option to suit the individual's wants, needs, and circumstances.

"We look at every single patient as a unique individual, and we try to personalize what the treatment options will be based on their job, their lifestyle, and what their goals are," he says. "Nothing is templated; rather than trying to fit a patient within an existing system, we zero in on what the patient wants to accomplish and then we design a treatment plan around their specific

situation, using state-of-the-art technology to achieve that end.”

As an example of this technology, Dr. Cassarella cites a 3D workflow, which involves sophisticated modeling software used to assess a patient’s morphology, devise a treatment plan, and then design highly precise orthodontic appliances such as expanders, aligners, and retainers. In addition to enabling greater accuracy and patient comfort, the technology means the patient can forgo traditional impressions, often regarded as one of the most unpleasant aspects of orthodontic treatment.

Treatment aside, patients will notice something special about DCO Orthodontic Specialists simply by walking through the door, according to Dr. Cassarella. He says the office’s unique design has created an atmosphere where “a 70-year-old will be receiving treatment right alongside a teenager, and everyone feels welcome and comfortable.” His staff, which has combined experience of more than 100 years in the industry, certainly helps to ensure that patients feel at home.

“Ours is a brand-new, state-of-the-art facility, and it’s designed to not feel or function like a typical healthcare space,” he says. “Every aspect, from the layout down to the décor, was designed to make people feel comfortable. It has an open and clean feel, starting with the waiting room. There’s no barrier between patients and staff at the front desk, which enables clear communication. We’ve also established a mechanism in which each patient has privacy [in the treatment area], but the openness means no one feels confined.”

by business and leadership, and I thought I would like to lead a team someday. When I started looking for careers that utilized all of those things, I found that dentistry—specifically orthodontics—was a great way to solve complicated problems that truly make an impact on people’s lives.”

In his orthodontic practice, Dr. Cassarella strives to not only make each person’s smile the best it can possibly be, but also to educate and motivate patients—particularly his youngest patients. With each interaction, he wants patients to understand “what’s special about them” so they can go out into the world and achieve. Playing the role of teacher comes naturally to him, he says, a direct result of the teachers and coaches who guided and inspired him in his formative years. One might even suggest teaching is in his blood, as both of his parents worked as educators.

His interest in education has taken him well beyond the walls of his office. Having previously served on the faculty of the University of Maryland, Dr. Cassarella now teaches the next generation of clinicians as a faculty member of the University of Pennsylvania School of Dentistry’s Department of Orthodontics.

“I love the process of teaching,” he says. “The University of Pennsylvania has a world-renowned residency program, so I’m able to share my expertise with some of the top dental school graduates from all around the world.

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—DR. DANIEL CASSARELLA

vital lessons children learn through athletic competition. That’s why the practice has become such a strong proponent of local Little League teams and other athletic organizations. It has also made a point to support philanthropic community organizations such as the Mitzvah Circle Foundation in Harleysville, which supports individuals and families who have gone through tragedy and crisis.

“We try to engage in causes and organizations that are most impactful to our patients,” he says. “For the past few months, we’ve been collecting school supplies for families in need and the brought them to [Mitzvah Circle], leading the effort to help local families.”

Going forward, Dr. Cassarella forecasts continued growth in all areas of the practice, from the number of patients it serves to the organizations and causes it sustains.

“We’ve gotten to a point where we’re evolving beyond a small startup practice,” he says. “Even as we continue to grow and build more relationships in the community, we’re going to push the envelope constantly to improve the quality of care we deliver. As DCO Orthodontic Specialists spreads its wings further, we intend to remain squarely focused on the things that have made the practice so special in the first place.” ■



Always Teaching

Becoming an orthodontist wasn’t a forgone conclusion for Dr. Cassarella. In fact, when he was a student mulling potential career paths, he considered “a whole list of things” he wanted to do with his life.

“I liked art, I liked science, I liked engineering, I was an athlete, and I saw the impact my teachers made,” he recalls. “I was also fascinated

These are dentists who are training to become orthodontists, so it’s a great way for me to stay on top of trends and stay sharp clinically. In addition to giving back, I’m helping to build the next generation of orthodontists that will lead the profession forward.”

“Giving back” happens much closer to home, too. As an accomplished high school athlete who competed in three sports—wrestling, football, and baseball—he understands the

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