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WORKING WITH PATTERSON TO BUILD A DREAM DENTAL PRACTICE

Patterson Dental

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Patterson Dental Territory Manager Matt Ernst has been visiting Dr. Ricky L. Farmer's practice in Somerset, Ky., every other Tuesday for years. The frequency of his visits created a deep relationship with the entire Lake Pointe Dental Care team. Like the other 80 to 90 offices he calls on routinely, Matt provides all their disposables needs – from composites and bonding agents, down to their cotton swabs.

"I've been a Patterson client since 2003 when I opened my first location," said Farmer. "Some of the service techs and equipment specialists have been with us for 16 years, so I feel our relationships are not just business but personal."

When planning to relocate and build out a larger office, Farmer trusted Patterson Dental to help him see his vision through. "I can rely on those guys and gals for superior service, products and placement," said Farmer. "They never let me down and have always given us great recommendations and guided us in leadership."

Dr. Farmer's success was evident as it became increasingly difficult to accommodate patients in his former 2,500-square-foot space. "We'd been talking about [building a larger practice] for quite a while, at least a couple of years before any ground was broken," Ernst recalled. "Dr. Farmer and I are constantly looking into the future and try to plan ahead for what he'll do."

Expert planning and guidance

Andy Braun, the Patterson Dental Equipment Specialist who spearheaded designing the layout, was very involved in the project. His work included configuring all the equipment, placing equipment orders, and more. "Andy is in charge of large capital equipment," Ernst said. "He's a really hard-working equipment specialist who has been with Patterson Dental for around 20 years. He also works as a territory representative and branch manager, so he understands both Patterson and what the dentists need. For this project, he worked mostly on the new office design, partnering with the contractors and architects."

Building the new practice took two years from initial concept to completion. "In summer 2016, I shared my goals and vision with Andy Braun" said Farmer. "Then I began looking for the right spot, acquired the land, developed the property and started the design and building phases."

After a year of design and development of the almost 8,000-square-foot site and a little more than a year of actual construction, Farmer's vision for Lake Pointe Dental Care is a reality. "We are now at 10 operational operatories with the capacity to go to 16. We have also slightly more than doubled staff in the past 14 to 16 months." he said.

The lead technician, James Baker, who has been doing these types of Patterson Dental projects for many years, oversaw technology installation. "James Baker is a 30-year veteran of the company," Ernst said. "Doctors really trust what he says and look to him for his expertise. I call him all the time, too. He is such a valuable resource. He knows the equipment inside and out. Kenny Kerr is a great technician as well. He and James are two of the most requested techs. People really like their personalities and the expertise they provide, and really enjoy having them in their offices. General Manager Kevin Parker, who leads the local Patterson branch, worked with us, too. We all coordinated and pooled resources to make this project come together."

Challenges along the way

The project mostly came together smoothly, with only a few roadblocks to overcome. "The challenges we had during this transition weren't focused on the dental aspect," said Farmer. "It was a breath of fresh air to know things were designed and installed really well. Because we had planned so well and the Patterson professionals and I did our homework prior to starting the project, any challenges during the dental installation were very minimal. My specific challenges were more structural- and excavation-related and included delays (of nine to 10 months) with logistics involving city planning, zoning, excavation and utilities, even with engineering plans well laid out in advance."

Something old and something new

After the new building was completed, the Patterson Dental team transferred a lot of Farmer's old equipment to the new site. "We moved over his existing technologies, including a Dentsply Sirona panoramic X-ray unit, which he's since upgraded to a 3D, and his CEREC equipment. Not too many dental practices in the Somerset area have a 3D machine, although some of the specialists do. Now he doesn't have to refer patients out to have their images made if it's a difficult case or if he needs to assess the bone in an implant case. Very few dentists in the area have this CEREC equipment. Offering his patients single-visit crowns also sets him apart."

While the Patterson team incorporated some of Farmer's existing cabinetry and chairs in the new space, one of the biggest parts of the project was ordering new cabinetry and dental seating from A-dec, one of Patterson's corporate partners. "Dr. Farmer bought all new cabinetry for seven of the operatories, with the plan to outfit the others as time goes on," Ernst said. "That was last year. We just completed outfitting two more operatories."

A peek behind the curtain

Andy coordinated getting the A-dec equipment ordered. He also partnered with the local A-dec representative, Mark Lewis, to help make it all happen. "We all toured the A-dec facility together, so Dr. Farmer could see their manufacturing process and the way A-dec does business," Ernst said. "Then everyone toured the Oregon wine country and had a great time! That was a wonderful opportunity for our team to further build the relationship with Dr. Farmer."

"That was a worthwhile trip," said Farmer. "I share that story with my patients. We display some storyboards in our office with pictures of my wife and me on-site in the [A-dec] factories, meeting the people who built these chairs that they're sitting in. I'm proud of the quality and that they are made here in the United States. I don't foresee us ever buying any other chair or cabinetry line."

A relationship for growth

According to Matt, Dr. Farmer has been a long-time partner with Patterson Dental because “he realizes that our primary goal as a distributor is to help him increase his production. If we can do that, our partners know it’s going to put substantially more money in their pockets than trying to reduce their supplies bill. But the value-added proposition goes well beyond that – the real value is partnering with a distributor who’s there for him no matter what. We give customers consistency and reliability. When they have equipment problems, we send them our technicians with the highest priority. We’ve partnered with Dr. Farmer to help him realize his dreams; we’re enabling him to offer the highest standard of dentistry to his patients.”

Matt has witnessed the effect of the new office design on the entire team. “The vibe I get from the team is that they just love working in the new office. It’s such an incredible environment. And Dr. Farmer is great to work for. He really goes out of his way to take care of his team in every way that he can to make them comfortable and happy. The morale of the team has been lifted by the new building. They feel special, important, and excited to be part of this team with the biggest, most beautiful office in Somerset, if not the state. It has such a great ambiance. You can tell it means a lot to them.”

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