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PARTNER PROFILE

by **Matt Cosentino** | photos by **Jody Robinson**

A Personal Touch

For **Dr. Peter Flaherty**, building an enduring dental practice at **Main Line Smile** is about much more than teeth—it's about relationships.



Mary Ellen DeFelice, the beloved office manager at Main Line Smile in Devon for nearly 25 years, was known to encourage her coworkers to push through difficult moments because, as she would often say, "nobody is promised tomorrow." For Peter Flaherty, D.M.D., and the rest of his team, that message has taken on even more meaning since DeFelice's passing earlier this year following a brief battle with cancer.

"She was an integral part of the practice and our work family, and we miss her terribly," says Dr. Flaherty, who founded Main Line Smile in 1993. "My patients absolutely adored her. She was smart, and she was one of those people who was a real bright light in your life and in the world. Her passing left a big hole in our office."

It's no surprise that Dr. Flaherty took the tragedy so hard, considering he has always prioritized personal relationships throughout his career—with colleagues, staff, and patients alike. It's those very bonds that have allowed him and the practice to move forward.

By seeking out new employees who possessed not only the qualifications but also the work ethic and the personality to fit in with the rest

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>
> —Dr. Peter Flaherty, Main Line Smile



of the team, he has rebuilt the practice in a way that would make DeFelice proud.

"Sometimes good things come out of bad things, and we have found some new team members who are working out really, really well," he says. "We have good people in key spots again, including some new faces. It took a bit, but we're back on track.

"I'm thankful for our patients who stuck by us during that period of chaos, where we had scheduling problems, billing problems, and insurance problems because we didn't have that key person in place to handle all of the things she had been for 25 years," he continues. "It was very disruptive and it was very sad, but it makes you to take a minute to look around and be grateful for the people in your life."

Gratitude is another theme of Dr. Flaherty's career. A native of the Boston area who came to Philadelphia to attend St. Joseph's University, he originally intended to become a medical doctor before shifting his focus and earning his degree from Temple University's Kornberg School of Dentistry.

Even more than three decades into his practice, he still looks forward to coming to the office every day and helping patients with a variety of issues.

"I have no plans to do anything else," he says. "I love it, I really do. I feel very fortunate that I chose well many years ago, starting a career that is just incredibly rewarding."

Combining aspects of general and preventative dentistry with restorative dentistry, Main Line Smile can handle just about any dental need for a wide spectrum of patients. Its services include cleanings, fillings, bridges, crowns, veneers, implants, and clear aligners.

Dr. Flaherty became fascinated with cosmetic dentistry from the early days of the groundbreaking treatments in the late 1980s. Upon starting his practice, he aspired to be all encompassing. Now, any time he can change the life of someone who is not happy with their smile, is hesitant to smile, or does not want to show their teeth out of embarrassment, he finds the results he's able to deliver for them incredibly rewarding.

"My day is full of a variety of things," he says. "I'm doing a filling in one room, I'm doing a crown in another, and I'm doing orthodontics or restoring an implant in yet another room. I'm also diagnosing a problem, putting together a treatment plan, finding out what the patient's goals are. It's a variety pack that keeps it fresh every day."

He's also the type of professional who respects the traditional training he received but is more than willing to adapt to technological changes. He's eager to implement new advancements into his office, granted he has the chance to do his research and speak to other doctors.

"I've been telling people it's an amazing time to be in dentistry now for 30 years," he says. "It just keeps getting more and more amazing all the time. The techniques are better, the materials are better, and the changeover to becoming more digital rather than analog has been fabulous. Things just get better and more predictable. It's a sweet spot, really. We get things done more comfortably, certainly, but we also get them done faster, so that's another check in the plus column."

Of course, there is one trend Dr. Flaherty has no intention of following: selling his practice to a private-equity group. Remaining independent has allowed him to devote the necessary time to each patient to address their concerns, rather than become an assembly line that ushers people in and out to maximize profit.

He has gained many new patients for that reason, while also continuing to treat the third and even fourth generations of families that started out with him more than 30 years ago.

"Patients love to have continuity in their care," Dr. Flaherty says. "They want the same dentists, they want the same hygienists, they want the same dental assistants, and they want to see the same person greeting them in the office. There's more of a revolving door of staff in those private-equity practices, and by and large, people don't like that.

"These private-equity groups own multiple practices and they squeeze as much profit out of them as they can," he continues. "Then they roll up and sell them to an even bigger outfit, which wants to squeeze even more profit out of it. Profit is great, but it's not just about profit. It's about care first."■

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