



All in the Family

TONY PRESTIPINO, CDT



A MOTHER'S POOR DENTAL HEALTH BECOMES INSPIRATION.

Photos Credit: Laura Kuah

When Tony Prestipino, CDT, was a teenager, he watched his mother lose all of her teeth to periodontal disease. His mother's poor dental health left an indelible mark on Prestipino and his brothers. Today, they're all in the dental profession. He and brother, David, became dental technicians and brother, Vince, became a prosthodontist.

Prestipino is president of Artifex, a 10-person laboratory based in Alexandria, Va. He started out in a medium-sized laboratory where he worked for 10 years at the beginning of his career. He then joined brother David as a partner at Artifex. When his brother moved away in 1997, he left Tony with sole ownership of the company.

Educated in the dental technology program at Northern Virginia Community College, Prestipino received specialized training from the Pankey Institute. In addition to his membership in NADL, he is a member of the Academy of Osseointegration, the Northern Virginia Implant Society and the Northern Virginia Dental Society. A published author and lecturer throughout the country on implant dentistry, Prestipino has also provided student and staff support at the University of Maryland.

Over the years (and because of his early experience with his mother), Prestipino developed an expertise in implants. From that, he's built a strong reputation and now lectures nationally on the topic. Today, his laboratory occupies two strong niches. At first, Artifex specialized in custom shading and anterior esthetics, an area in which it still does a lot of business. The second niche, Prestipino noted, was growing a business on the reputation that the laboratory could manufacture an abutment that looked like it grew in the patient's mouth.

The motivation to build that business came when a Clear Choice Implant Center moved in just



down the street from Artifex. That spurred Prestipino to learn what he could about competing with a large corporation and to further develop his implant services. Today Artifex produces about 150 implant cases a month.

"When we started doing that, we doubled in revenue, doubled in size, doubled in everything," Prestipino said.

Although Artifex still does a lot of hand building, Prestipino has also developed an expertise in CAD/CAM.

"We had gotten very well-known for doing implant cases and doing them correctly, in the wax-'em-up method. I needed to be as good at CAD/CAM as I was at doing them with my own hands. If you can't wax one (correctly) you can't design one in virtual reality. We became very efficient at CAD/CAM abutments. We used to have 99 percent hand wax. Now we do maybe 10 percent hand wax," he said.

The chairside (or OR-side, as it were) consulting business developed alongside Prestipino's thirst for

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knowledge and his disappointment that the dental technician profession is not as well-respected by dental colleagues as he thinks it should be.

"If you make yourself equal, you are equal. You know as much or more as the dentists you are working with," he said. "Technicians need to go to CE, read magazines, know what they're looking for and why someone made a case the way they did. If you learn about anatomy you can make better prosthetics."

On the business side, Prestipino developed a strong relationship with implant supplier Nobel Biocare. He embraced its products, learned all he could about them, and never used third-party parts. Soon, the supplier was referring business to Artifex. Prestipino has developed a similarly close relationship with BioMet 3i, for whom he also provides educational opportunities for the supplier's clients.

"Reps know I am not going to knock off their parts and take their commissions," he said. "One of the key reasons we've done so well, is because we



PRESTIPINO IN THE HOT SEAT

What is the hottest thing about dental technology?

Converting a denture patient to a fixed patient.

What one change would you like to see the industry make?

I would like to make it mandatory to inform patients where their teeth were made and what their teeth were made out of.

If you could have dinner with three industry peers, who would they be?

Dennis Tarnow—the most well-known dentist in the world. I love talking to him. He is so genuine, so willing to give up advice for free and he's never in a rush. And my brothers, Vince and David.

Who has had the most influence on your career?

My brother David. My brother Vincent. My 3i rep, Gordon Evans.

Where do you think the biggest area of growth is in dental laboratory technology?

Immediate load implants.

are total supporters of implant companies and parts. ... The reps learn so much more about you, and your motivation and then you have created a true team. The implant company and its reps are your team members. That implant rep is so vital, because he is out there saying 'this lab is great. Use them.'"

Those relationships have cemented Artifex's reputation as a high-quality producer. Prestipino now lectures and writes articles about CAD/CAM, abutments and virtual reality dentistry among other topics.

"Companies invite us to speak. I am a CDT talking to dentists and surgeons about how to treat their patients," he said. "That's a humbling experience, to be the part of the team that is behind the scenes. When you lecture before or in front of a bunch of dentists or surgeons, it means the world to me that they trusted me with their time."

By embracing technology, maintaining quality and building strong relationships with suppliers and dentists, Prestipino is poised for the next decade. He sees immediate load, full-arch prosthesis as a future niche.

"If you are a dental lab, you should have milling machines and scanners. After you pay the expense of having the machine, the techs can do it faster, which makes it more affordable. We can mill our own e.Max and wax-ups. Only a few can mill their own abutments and bars. Implant companies want out of the responsibility of making a patient-specific abutment. That's where (the industry) is going," he said.

Prestipino urges colleagues to think creatively—maybe even invent something. It demonstrates to dental colleagues that you're learning something new, taking risks.

"If you invent something the industry knows you really are thinking beyond the present box," Prestipino said.

Although he's built a very successful business, he is most proud of the respect he's earned as an educator and lecturer.

"I have been very fortunate to educate and lecture to peers and colleagues and dentists. The embrace that I get from them, from the company that compensates me, is so emphatic and passionate, that's something I'm most proud of," he said. "It's having an implant company's employees actually enjoy what you have to say and say that it helpful."

And Prestipino's mother? Tony and brother Vince worked on her together and she has a lovely set of teeth. In fact, he's never lost sight of that end goal—the patient's smile. **JDT**