





COMBINING CAREER AND COMMUNITY

Into a Successful Practice

For some people, dentistry is a calling. It was for Ricky L. Farmer, DMD. Dr. Farmer is the owner of Lake Pointe Dental Care in Somerset, KY, a rural community of nearly 70,000 people surrounded by rolling hills, Lake Cumberland and forests. Farmer finds inspiration in his surroundings. He believes in his purpose, his patients and team, and his community, while living by his motto “Delivering contemporary, comprehensive, compassionate care.”

“I was the first person in my family to go to and finish college,” Farmer said. “We don’t have any dental professionals in my family, so dentistry was new for us. Ironically, through my younger years and into high school, I tended to be

PHOTO – LEFT: Dr. Ricky L. Farmer, DMD, and his dog Dodger
 ABOVE: Drs. Ellen White and Farmer standing outside the Lake Pointe Dental Care office



more in an arts curriculum. Design, art and 3D classes appealed to me. It wasn't until I got into college and postsecondary education that I really started leaning more toward biology, anatomy and the human body."

An early childhood experience may have influenced his decision years later to become a dentist. "When I was very young, I fell and bit my tongue nearly in half," he recalled. "So, one of my earliest memories is being in an oral surgeon's office and the care involved in repairing the damage to my tongue. I was probably too young to understand the impact of that, but I think it may have set off a chain of events, creating a respect for the

profession and admiring what it can do for people."

Farmer said he was always drawn to doing something that would help people look and feel better, be healthier and allow them to succeed in different aspects of their lives – socially, financially and for their general health. "Being good with fine details by using my hands, wanting to be creative, having a knack for design, symmetry and esthetics, combined with a passion to help people, are what I think dentistry really married all together for me," he said.

Farmer's family has lived in Somerset for generations. He received his

undergraduate degree in biology and chemistry from Lindsey Wilson College (Columbia, KY) and attended the University of Louisville School of Dentistry. He then embarked on his journey to build a legacy of service in his hometown.

THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A LEGACY

Farmer and his wife Kellie, also a native of Somerset, returned to the area after dental school to open his first practice. "We started very humbly with just three operatories and two team members," he recalled. "We had zero patients in the beginning, but we have grown steadily since and made the decision a couple of years ago to



keep up with new patient demands and the growth of our community. Our area has seen tremendous growth over the past two years. We needed to expand, and I think it was the right time in the right place for the style of practice that we wanted to build."

His vision for Lake Pointe Dental Care was to transition it to a larger group practice where he could bring in associates who shared the same philosophies of care and goals that he has about providing for the Somerset community and beyond. "We're rural Kentucky; we're not a big metro area by any means," Farmer said. "But we are the medical hub for this part of the

state. This is where the hospitals and specialists are. People are driving far distances to our area for medical care, for jobs, to eat and shop and so on."

Farmer was able to align the dynamics of his dream practice with the growing community. "A bigger group practice would be able to handle more patients and meet more needs for the next 20 to 25 years of my practice life," he said. "Our expansion has created more jobs. Our team has grown and we have more opportunities for patients to receive care."

Farmer ran out of space in his previous 2,500-square-foot

location. He couldn't add any more operatories or create any more room. "We had no more space in our schedule either," he said. "I felt bad. We had to schedule patients so far out in the schedule that I didn't feel like we were taking care of them in the best manner we should. I could have made the

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PHOTO – OPPOSITE PAGE

A team member reviewing images from the Orthophos SL Panoramic Imaging System

PHOTOS – ABOVE

Reception area with a lamp made from repurposed bourbon barrels

Brochures displayed on A-dec cabinetry

Operatory includes autoclave units and A-dec cabinets

Patients can enjoy a rustic view of the outdoors



“When people think of Kentucky they oftentimes think of horses, bourbon and coal. We owe a lot of our state’s economic growth and success to these local fixtures. In honoring this heritage, I have included a few special features throughout our design. I asked an artist from Louisville to repurpose bourbon barrels for our lamps and designed all of our lighting to tie in with them. We have reclaimed barn wood throughout the office and a dozen hanging barn doors to accent our walkways. I also brought in actual Kentucky coal to be utilized in some of our exterior landscape features.” — Dr. Farmer

decision to ride that out. To be frank, I remember saying to some of my advisors around 2015, ‘Hey, if we could repeat this year 25 more

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PHOTOS – CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Spacious and bright work stations

Lighting that ties into the bourbon barrel décor

Lavender for a calming scent throughout the office

Kentucky coal for local accents

Concrete stamp from a dock used in the entryway

times, and not change a thing, that would be great.”

AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW

“I’ve always been a very driven person. It felt very complacent just to remain at that level. It was a highly successful level, which was a blessing. But I don’t raise my kids that way. I don’t mentor my team that way — to be complacent and not grow. It’s okay to be grateful and content, but you should always strive to learn

and improve, professionally and personally. I couldn’t see myself just maintaining the schedule that we had for the rest of my career. We were at the point where we weren’t going to accept new patients. I felt like we would not only be stagnant, but we’d also be declining over time if we stayed there. I wouldn’t have been happy.

“I have the benefit of nearly 42 years in this community,” he continued. “I live and breathe in these

Dr. Farmer on Working with Patterson Dental:

"Patterson is great. I've been a Patterson client since 2003 when I opened my first location. 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. They know our team, we know them, we know their families. We know a lot of the same people outside of dentistry.

"I can rely on those guys and gals for superior service, products and placement. They never let me down and have always given us great recommendations and guided us in leadership. They are patient with me, too. Even though one of my core values is to stay on the cutting edge of the profession, that doesn't mean I will invest in technology the day it comes out. I like to see it vetted for a while in the industry. Patterson Dental is not too pushy, and that's important to me. For me, to be in business with someone, I have to trust that they have my best interests, and my patients' and team's best interests foremost in mind. If it makes sense, fits our practice philosophy, ideals, budget and our time frame, we're typically all in when we decide to do something."

neighborhoods. I know the market intimately, so I see the patterns of population growth, business development and economic growth. I also know that it's not going to stop any time soon. I was young enough in my career that I could expand and invest the time and money to see that through. Now I have more open space in the schedule, more operatories, more care providers and more staff to treat more patients who are obviously still requesting appointments."

BREAKING GROUND

Building the new practice took two years from initial concept to completion. "In summer 2016, I shared my goals and vision with Andy Braun, my Patterson equipment specialist. Then I began looking for the right spot, acquired the land, developed the property, and started the design and building phases. Sidebar: Andy and I actually played college baseball against each other! We have a really long history and relationship."

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 became 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. There's been a lot of growth, fast," he said.

Dr. Ellen White has recently joined the practice as a new associate and Tiffany Keck, RN, is the in-house esthetic nurse, providing all the esthetic care under Lake Pointe Aesthetics.

"The irony is you need to be careful what you wish for but still plan for it because when it happens, you have to learn a new management style," he advised. "When I started practicing in 2003, my philosophies on growth included adding another operator or team member only when we could properly manage what we currently had. Incremental growth over time allowed me to do that. Straight out of dental school I couldn't have managed a team as large as this with multiple providers. I would have failed. But going about it in the way we did, even with more rapid growth than I had forecasted, has been great. The management systems we

have in place still work, and we're maintaining the same philosophies of care.

"I have a fantastic dental team," Farmer continued. "It's not just the building or the practice, it's the people in it that fundamentally make the difference when everyone buys into our philosophy of 'contemporary, comprehensive, compassionate care.' When we hit those three pillars, we nail it."

DESIGNING SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF

Farmer was very conscientious about the location and exterior design of his building. "I wanted to build a landmark in our community because our office is one of the first things you see when you come into our town. I wanted it to be something people are proud to see. We get a lot of comments on some of the features we've tied in, such as the lake house-type light tower. That design feature provides no functional aspect to dentistry at all, but I wasn't building a dental office, I was building an experience."

Farmer told the Patterson Dental specialists, the architect and



the contractors that building an experience was a very important concept to him. “Unfortunately, and maybe for good reason sometimes, most people don’t enjoy going to a dental office,” he said. “But people enjoy a great experience. I knew we could tap into that emotion and demonstrate that everything we do in our office is to help patients have a good experience. For me, this was a strategic 360-degree design approach: from the high ceilings, to the huge windows and the water

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PHOTO – ABOVE

Check-in and greeting area is bright and cheery

PHOTOS – OPPOSITE PAGE

Dr. Farmer using an intraoral scanner to view a patient’s oral cavity

Team member using the CEREC MCXL Milling Unit

features. A lot of the design was developed with comfort in mind. I don’t want people to feel constricted or claustrophobic whatsoever, so our plan was to open it up.”

He described the interior décor as a very upscale rustic feel. “Yet it doesn’t feel like a lodge at all,” he said. “I didn’t want that. There are a lot of neat little touches, like reclaimed wood and the concrete entryway. My builders surprised me by making a concrete stamp from a dock at the lake to use in the entryway. It actually looks like you’re walking on a dock as you come into the office, which is really cool. I love it! Also, I commissioned a local artist to do all of our custom artwork of abstract lake scenes from the area. I wanted the office to have an art gallery feel as well.”

The entire backside of the building consists of a row of treatment operatories facing a natural cliffside. Farmer said the huge windows and highly vaulted ceilings make it feel very comfortable and open. “We have witnessed firsthand that it helps patients who carried dental anxiety into the practice and are now able to receive treatment without anti-anxiety types of protocols,” Farmer reported. “They’ve even commented on it making a big difference. It was a purposeful design, to make it feel less intimidating and more relaxing. For some people, going to the dentist is their greatest fear. I knew we could hit a home run if our design helped eliminate some fear from their dental experience.”

Living in a lake community inspired bringing nature inside. “At some



point, anyone who's from our area has been impacted by our lake and what it does for them, for tourism and for local businesses," Farmer said. "The waterfalls and rock formations are the patient's view when they sit in the dental chair. It just feels natural to our area. It's great for the team, too. It raises everyone's mood."

TEAM INPUT

During the design and planning phases, Farmer engaged every team member to collaborate on the project. "I invited them to bring their ideas to the table about anything they liked, or that would make their job better, more efficient or more fun," he said. "We also had a list of what not to do or that wouldn't work. We all contributed a lot of little things that created big-time results. They

feel some ownership because they've been a big part of the process."

Farmer said his favorite room is the education suite because "education, training and bettering oneself is very important to me. I travel to a lot of continuing education (CE) courses to expand my knowledge base and our treatment options, but I wanted to bring CE in-house for my team, too. So, I designed a strategic space where we can collaborate and learn as a team. The business owner who stops listening to his or her employees will at some point be surrounded by people who have nothing to say. I tell my team, 'Your ideas matter to me.' We have a wealth of knowledge and dental experience that we can bring to our brainstorming table every day,

and at every monthly meeting. Now I'm bringing in outside educators to teach my team. We're actually able to leverage our own talent and knowledge to improve the practice."

PATIENT REACTIONS

Farmer said providing same-day crowns with CEREC and Omnicam is probably the lifeblood of his practice. "We do digital dentistry every day," he said. "It's wonderful for our patients because the products are top of the line and the treatment modalities are so efficient. They save time for us and our patients. I specifically designed the floor plan to make these technologies an actual experience for our patients. Our milling, X-ray and CBCT units are in glass-room displays in the heart of the office. Patients love to watch their





Dr. Farmer's Technologies

Dentsply Sirona Orthophos SL
Panoramic Imaging System

CEREC Omnicam and Bluecam
CAD Systems

CEREC MC XL Milling Unit

Dentsply Sirona Schick 33 sensors

Eaglesoft software

A-dec cabinetry, stools, dental
chairs and lighting

PHOTOS – OPPOSITE PAGE – TOP TO BOTTOM

The open and welcoming reception area
Lake Pointe Dental Care and the Patterson team

PHOTOS – ABOVE – LEFT TO RIGHT

Drs. Farmer and White

A hygienist evaluating a patient's teeth

crowns being milled. It's neat to see them taking videos with their phones showing some of their dental work being done in our office and posting them online. We're very proud of our technologies, and I'm proud to have partnered with Patterson on that. CEREC is one of my favorite things to do. I enjoy the process and the value it gives the patient in a tangible way."

The new design incorporates top-of-the-line A-dec dental cabinetry, chairs

and delivery units, which Farmer said have improved ergonomics, as well as workflow. "That has really streamlined what we do," he said. "It makes our schedule flow very efficiently, plus it looks great. They are extremely well built. I had an opportunity to see these furnishings being fabricated in A-dec's facility outside of Portland, Oregon. That was a worthwhile trip. 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 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."

Another thing he did with his patients' comfort in mind was develop "scent branding" for the office. "I walked into a resort once in Mexico and I don't think I'll ever forget the smell of it," he recalled. "It blew me away. It was like background noise — it was there, but I couldn't really put my finger on it. It was just wonderful, and it made an impact, so much so that I eventually tracked down the gentleman who ran that chain of resorts and I asked him about it. He wouldn't tell me his secret sauce, which I very well respected."

Farmer spent about six months researching scent branding. "I know psychologically and physiologically that your sense of smell is your greatest sense tied to memory," he said. "Dental offices often have a very distinct smell – medicinal and sterile – and I wanted to avoid that as much as we could. So, I went to work on what I wanted the office to smell like."

He took his geographical area and calming effects of the scents into consideration. "The scent goes through our ventilation system," he said. "It's made specifically for us, and my team doesn't even know the formula. I'll tell you one ingredient, though: It has a little lavender in it. I wanted to tie that in, too, because we have a thriving lavender farm in our community. We also have lavender strategically planted around our exterior, as well as dried plants throughout (supplied by our local farmers). I just thought it would be a nice touch to highlight another local feature."

"It's very calming, very clean," he said of the scent. "It doesn't smell like a dental office, first of all. Second, it doesn't look like a dental office. It's like they're somewhere else, sitting in a serene

Challenges Along the Way...

According to Farmer, "The challenges we had during this transition weren't focused on the dental aspect. 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. I have four acres of land and could build practically any size of building I desired. So, we basically built around the dental equipment. We didn't have to retrofit anything. That's how we minimized any roadblocks, because we always had that design in mind. 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."

environment looking out on the lake. It's very validating to hear patients say, 'This is the most relaxed I've been all week!' That typically just doesn't happen in a dental chair. But it does when you get the experience right."

Farmer was determined to engage every sense, so when a patient arrives, their senses of smell, sight, sound and touch are all activated. From the décor to the soothing music played over the Sonos system and plush fabrics he chose

for the new dental chairs, he's hit just about all the bases. "Sense of taste...we're still working on that. It's still dental!" he said. "But we do provide fresh infused water for our patients as they enter our doors."

Partnerships That Build Dreams

Patterson sales representative Matt Ernst has been visiting Dr. Farmer's office every other Tuesday for years. The frequency of his visits created a deep relationship with the entire team. Like the other 80 to 90 offices he calls on routinely, Matt provides all of their disposables needs – from composites and bonding agents, down to their cotton swabs. "I'm the face of Patterson for them," Matt explained. "I handle all of their merchandise, orders and issues."

Matt was well aware that Dr. Farmer was outgrowing his office. "We'd been talking about this idea for quite a while, at least a couple of years before any ground was broken," Matt recalled. "Dr. Farmer and I are constantly looking into the future and try to plan ahead for what he'll do."

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, etc. "Andy is in charge of large capital equipment," Matt 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."

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," Matt continued. "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."

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

IMPACT AND FOCUS

Farmer said the new office makes him feel more motivated. "I think we practice at a higher level and feel like we can deliver even better on the patients' and the community's expectations. I am personally more motivated to stay on the leading edge by being in a contemporary setting. Side note: If I can't sit knee to knee and eye to eye and have a candid conversation with a patient and understand what they're going through as a person, then why should they trust me with their treatment? Listening is a big part of what we do. Professionally, it's exciting when

I learn something new and push myself every day. It's hard to feel bad in an environment that looks and feels the way this does. It's hard to not be motivated and energized in an environment that was specifically designed for the team in that way too. We've eliminated negativity.

"I'm also very humbled and appreciative because I've been blessed with a lot. My wife and I started the practice with nothing and that in and of itself was very motivating. Building to the point where we are now, seeing the rapid rate of growth, and having the

wonderful team that we do, I feel blessed. It's surreal sometimes – and I catch myself doing this a lot – to stop and look around for a moment and feel a sense of gratitude for what I've been given and to be able to do what we do in this environment, because I know that's not the norm. This office is bigger than just me and it impacts a lot of lives. I am humbled by the fact that I have been able to build something that will outlast me, that supports a ton of families and helps a lot of patients. For me, if that's not enough to keep you coming back on the next day, then I don't think you'll ever be happy." **BP**

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," Matt said. "That was last year. We just completed outfitting two more operatories."

Farmer has made substantial investments on capital equipment. The Patterson team installed 12 O'Clock operatory units in each new treatment room and the central cabinetry, which is located between adjoining operatories, contains pass-through 2D X-ray units.

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," Matt 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," Matt said.

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 reclaimed wood gives you the vibe of being at the lake. The artwork is lake themed. It's probably one of the most attractive practices in the state of Kentucky with the waterfalls, paintings, and cattails motif. 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."