





Who's **HOT** *2024*

Duo

The beauty behind this team is their willingness to share all that lies behind their achievements, including both their real struggles and their encouraging wins.

Multi-Generation

Each generation played a significant role in growing the lab within their era.

Strategic Partner

Even after 47 years, anyone that knows him still sees the fire within him to succeed, to please the customer, and mostly, to treat others well.

Up-and-Coming

The way the next generation learns, communicates, and advances is different, and it is the future.

Volunteer

He is deeply motivated to use his skill set to help people get back into society, whether they are affected by addiction, homelessness, prison, or simply don't have the funds to afford dental care.



Duo



Anita Cranford, CDT, and Elise Holasek, CDT, co-owners of Identical Dental Lab, Norman, Oklahoma, have been following each other since birth. Identical twins, they are accustomed to finishing each other's sentences and their energies are synchronized into a unique yet beautiful harmony. As their life stories weave together, so do their accomplishments, resulting in an indestructible twine.

Holasek started as a delivery driver for a crown and bridge lab when she was seventeen years old in Lubbock, Texas. The crown and bridge lab she worked at collaborated with a local removable lab that needed a driver, and that is when Cranford was pulled into the industry. During their downtime, they were both trained in different elements of laboratory work, until Cranford decided to move to Ft. Worth, Texas. After a short stint at a dental office, she began at Crown Kingdom and launched the next chapter of her career. Within a few months, Holasek decided to move to Ft. Worth and was hired there as well.

Holasek said, "When we were in Lubbock I learned how to opaque, stain and glaze, and layer porcelain. When I was hired at Crown Kingdom as a ceramist, I thought I knew what I was doing, but this was another ball game. We were taught so much there."

Cranford said, "I started off with model work and was taught to wax, invest, and metal finish, and waxing is still my favorite thing to do. It makes me sad that so many people joining the industry today never learned it, as that's where a lot of the artistry lies. There are so many good things about digital, but still so much about analog ways that are important."

The sisters even embarked on parenthood together, with their first children being born just four weeks apart. That is where the similarities end though, as Cranford has one son and Holasek has three daughters and one son. As their families grew, they were able to take their kids to the lab while they worked, and this flexibility lit their desire to start their own lab. This was



Anita Cranford, CDT, and Elise Holasek, CDT, Identical Dental Lab, Norman, Oklahoma

What is the hottest thing in dental technology today?

The hottest thing in dental technology is the new digital workflows and materials. There are so many ways to do new things and it is constantly changing. Also, utilizing people as resources. Today there are many more people willing to share their knowledge compared to how it was in the past.

What industry change would you make if you could?

We need to educate others about the profession. Most people don't know anything about dental laboratories, and increasing awareness would be beneficial to bringing more people into the industry.

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"Working with family and having that moral support is important to me."

—Holasek

delayed as Cranford moved to Albuquerque for a few years, but they eventually both landed in Oklahoma and started working at the same lab in Norman.

Holasek said, "In the evenings, we would plan the opening of our own lab, and slowly started working less during our day job and more for ourselves. We had a great and understanding boss, who still to this day helps us out at times. We finally set the official launch date and the lab has grown from there."

Cranford said, "Our kids would get picked up from school and taken back to the lab. Two and a half years ago we finally bought our own building, which we should have done twenty years ago, and we now have a total of 10 employees not counting ourselves."

Working together is certainly nothing new to them, and they each stick to their specialty. Cranford manages the models, waxing, trimming, QC, digital designs, and metal finishing. From there, it moves onto Holasek, a ceramist who manages the porcelain department. They handle a lot of large implant cases and struggle to keep up with the work while also managing busy families.

Holasek said, "We both still work all day and a lot of nights and weekends. About three years ago we hired an office manager to assist, but even that was difficult for us to let someone else handle the calls. As a small lab, we felt we could handle it all, and it was hard to find someone to trust and delegate to, even if it would make our lives easier. We are thankful to have found that."

While they would like to grow the lab, they recognize the difficulty in keeping up with the new technology and equipment, especially as a smaller lab. The industry continues to unfold in many ways, but they know they need to be selective with what they do, and how much of it they do. Finding that balance is an important goal in their future.

Cranford said, "It's important to embrace innovation, and we will keep up, but we also need to be selective. We both want to find a better balance between work and home."

► Anita Cranford, CDT, and Elise Holasek, CDT, continued

Who has had the most influence on your career?

There are two people. First is Nancy Johnson, owner of Crown Kingdom Dental Lab, Ft. Worth, Texas. She shared her knowledge and inspiration and looking back now, we wish we could have soaked in even more. We were only 20 when we started working with her and we learned so much. We would have to say the second is Peter Pizzi. Peter Pizzi is someone that continually challenges, encourages, and inspires us with his knowledge and expertise. We are thankful he is so generous with his knowledge and time.

What do you think is the biggest opportunity as the profession moves into the future?

Relationships. Things have changed between the doctor and the lab, and now there is more collaboration in order to reach better outcomes. Labs need to be a source of knowledge for dentists and think outside of the box to come up with solutions for difficult cases.

Holasek said, “Our children are getting older and are starting to have kids of their own, and there’s a lot we don’t want to miss out on. We are happy with the way things have grown at the lab, but it wasn’t without challenges. At least we know that we set an example and taught our kids how to work hard, and some of them have even decided to work in the lab with us.”

Another part of their equation includes continuing education. Both are ardent advocates of training and learning, and are regular attendees of LMT Day, Ladies of the Mill, Whip Mix Digital Forum, DLAT meetings, and other regional shows. They emphasize the importance of learning what the doctors are learning and attending those courses as well. Yet in order to successfully balance family, career, and education, they know that it could never be done alone.

Holasek said, “It’s always good to have someone to support you. I have an amazing husband of almost twenty years, and he has supported me through the long hours, and even did most of the renovations at our lab. Working with family and having that moral support is important to me. In addition, the connections that we have made going to industry meetings, well, it’s unbelievable. There is so much to learn and everyone is much more willing to share and advise.”

“There are so many peers and resources out there,” said Cranford. “During COVID, Chris Bradley



(owner of Smile Line USA) started a women’s business owners zoom call to discuss different options and ways to get through it. In this industry, it is critical to surround yourself with people who have knowledge about the things you are interested in so that you can grow.”

Anita Cranford and Elise Holasek truly embody the epitome of a team. Their steadfast support of each other, their families, and their desire to learn has created a flame that draws others to achieve the same success. The beauty behind this team is their willingness to share all that lies behind their achievements, including both their real struggles and their encouraging wins. Above all, it is clear that they find their ultimate strength and confidence within each other and are a captivating example of what it takes to survive and thrive, together.

*“It’s
important
to embrace
innovation.”*

—Cranford





OTTAWA DENTAL
LABORATORY

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Multi-Generation



Jumping into the family business may have seemed natural, but it was not imperative. Yet brothers Luke Caruso, III, COO, and Jim Caruso, CAO, of Ottawa Dental Laboratory, LLC (ODL), Ottawa, Ill., still landed squarely in the center as leaders of the third-generation, family-owned business. Luke and Jim's grandfather, Luke (Tony) Caruso, started the laboratory in 1937. Their father, Luke Caruso, Jr., joined in 1965 after graduating from Northwestern University. While Tony founded ODL on removable prosthetics, Luke, Jr. was instrumental in developing the crown and bridge and implant departments, which catapulted the laboratory into the full-service arena.

Luke Caruso, III, explored his career options after graduating from the University of Iowa. He launched his career in the dental field as a dental supplier sales representative in the San Francisco area. That experience exposed him to both the struggles and successes of laboratory owners, and he started to see the industry from a different angle. Luke also recognized early on that digital technology would be a key factor in the industry's future. After four years of being in sales, in 2005 he returned to ODL.

"I started in the model department," said Luke. "I also took the opportunity to attend the Kois Center and other advanced training courses so that I could build my dental acumen and confidence when communicating with doctors. To this day, building relationships and collaborating on sensible treatment plans that lead to successful results is what I enjoy doing the most. My sales experience gave me the perspective to see what was coming, and I felt I could be an asset and add value to the family business. I also wanted to work alongside my brother, Jim, who had landed at the lab one year prior. I figured we were either going to grow or fail but we could do it together."

Jim Caruso, also a graduate of the University of Iowa, moved to Chicago post-graduation and began his career working in sales and marketing. He joined

Luke Caruso, III, and Jim Caruso, Ottawa Dental Laboratory, LLC, Ottawa, Illinois

What is the hottest thing in dental technology today?

Treatment strategies for the full arch space and adopting photogrammetry into the digital workflow, coupled with 3D printing, are critical factors of dental evolution. Our overall strategy involves staying on top of technology and pivoting our digital workflows to maximize accuracy and efficiency in our lab.

What industry change would you make if you could?

Dental insurance reimbursement has not kept pace with inflation and other factors in our culture, resulting in additional pressure on laboratories to reduce costs for the dental office. Our commitment to the advancement of technology and employee career development does not waver, so we make critical business decisions. Another area is technology and materials. They are often heavily marketed before they are ready. Doctors request "gen one" materials that have yet to be proven.

Who has had the most influence on your career?

Our father has had the most influence on our careers. He guided us in handling challenging colleague, customer, and employee behaviors, and we realize the importance of the firmly planted company core values that were here before us. We are also fortunate to have built a qualified professional team (legal, human resources, financial) that we rely on for their expertise.

What do you think is the biggest opportunity as the profession moves into the future?

More than ever, clinicians depend on labs to stay abreast of new materials and simplify complex workflows for easy implementation in their offices. Laboratories need to have qualified resources to consult, teach, advise, and engage outside of the lab and into the dental office.

"We spent quite a few Saturdays hanging out at the lab with our grandfather."

—Jim Caruso

the family business when ODL's sales and marketing position became available in 2004. Jim embraced the opportunity to learn more about the overall business, which led him on the path to managing the company's finances, sales, and marketing. Although Luke III and Jim took different paths, and now manage different areas of the laboratory, they were both reared on the same foundation their grandfather and father established as successful businesspeople.

By the time Luke and Jim returned to the family business, digital and other technologies were taking off and they did not hesitate to run with it. Each generation played a significant role in growing the lab within their era. Based on this foundation, the business will undoubtedly continue to expand in the years to come.

"We spent quite a few Saturdays hanging out at the lab with our grandfather when we were younger, but never had the chance to work with him professionally," said Jim. "We did work with our father daily for ten years before we became co-presidents. We spent time learning the various sectors of the business from him. My father was keen enough to know that he alone was not going to be the only way for us to learn the industry. He brought in other experts, respected individuals in their field, to mentor and teach us. For example, we would have monthly meetings with a human resource manager from General Electric. He knew we needed to report to others, and not him, and connected us with the right resources. This was key to our growth."

This tactic proved a success. In the early 2000s the lab had approximately sixty employees. It grew to eighty by 2008, and currently has eight locations with a total of 375 employees. Luke and Jim had looked carefully at ways to grow the business outside of Ottawa and decided to focus on acquisitions and start-ups. They acquired their first lab in 2012, shortly thereafter opened a start-up in downtown Chicago, and their growth has continued to expand in the Midwest.

"Laying the groundwork and structure for growth is something I will also credit to our father," said Jim. "Not only did he teach us the value of a strong HR and finance department, but he also had a vision and created a career development program with clearly defined skill levels and compensation advancements. We were able to take that structure to our other labs and help technicians see a career path coupled with professional and personal growth through skill-building and increased wages. This path allows people to grow at their own pace and rewards those who work hard for advancement."

Over the years, Luke learned the importance of quickly getting processes and systems in place to ensure a successful acquisition. Now, they have a formal year-long schedule of ODL process implementation. Three years ago, they also launched a CDT study club run by the director of training. They meet once per month and have seen fourteen technicians become certified, for a total of 31 CDTs on staff. When acquiring labs, the technicians get excited about the opportunity to obtain certification and continue their education.

"Many technicians do not realize where their careers can go, and we created a level system that reduces turnover, which is more important today than ever," said Luke. "Finding talent is expensive, and when we train our own people, we train to our core values resulting in more predictable outcomes. As a result, we have four full-time trainers on staff. We want to see people from our community move from entry-level to management and make more than they ever thought they could. This applies to everyone in our business, from customer service to highly skilled technicians."

Jim said, "Both my grandfather and my father believed in education. We want our people to learn and get better, and not just get through the day. It is so important to understand why you do what you do to create passion. We even put our receptionists through PTC training so they can understand terminology. If you are going to work here, we want you to be completely invested in dental technology."



The family component continues to run strong throughout the organization. ODL invests heavily in their community by participating in local charities, including food pantries and the YMCA, and encourages employees to concentrate on personal wellness achievements. Every year ODL hosts a fall festival for over 500 employees and their families, and at Christmas, they have a Santa drive, providing gifts to children.

As brothers working in a multi-generation business, Luke and Jim complement each other, respect each other's professional strengths, and trust each other's expertise. They leave business at the door, and do not talk much work outside of the facility. With eight children between them aged seven to sixteen years old, they have active family lives and respect the importance of that for their employees as well. As for the future of the 86-year-old business, it looks promising.

Jim said, "We continue to look for opportunities to acquire labs. We do not have as much money as private equity firms, but we do offer a fair deal and lab owners know that their people will be taken care of. Our goal is to grow to be the largest lab in the Midwest. We know it can be demanding. Yet this industry has supported our family and our employees for over eighty-six years as we strive to service customers and improve quality."



Luke offers his advice to people who are considering joining the family lab.

"When working with family there is deep history, and it should have a high level of trust," he said. "Prepare to work harder than everyone else in the building and do not be afraid to take calculated risks. If you do not have a good relationship before you go into business, it will not get better, so ensure you get along before joining forces. Most importantly, not everything is a big deal. Respect each other's roles and responsibilities and only have conversations about what you need to. You do not need to agree on everything, but you do need to be 100 percent supportive of one another."

"Many technicians do not realize where their careers can go."

—Luke Caruso





Strategic Partner



September 30, 2023, passed without fanfare, much like any other day, but for Anthony (Tony) Circelli, it marked 47 years of employment at Kulzer North America. In the summer of 1976, he was an 18-year-old high school graduate who spent more time playing sports with neighborhood friends than worrying about a career. One July night while celebrating a softball championship win, Rich, one of his buddies, told him he knew someone hiring at Jelenko (now Kulzer). Circelli stumbled in the next morning, met the then refining manager, and was instantly hired. At the time, Jelenko just needed a body; little did anyone know where it would lead.

"I started by mixing chemicals in the lab, and by 1978 I became an assayer in the scrap department," Circelli said. "This position determines how much precious metal is in the scrap and back in 1980, 95 percent of it contained precious metal. Being the assayer was important to me and provided knowledge of every aspect within the refining process. Although all I knew was scrap for those years, Tony Montiero saw something in me, and in 1982, at only twenty-four years old, he asked if I could manage the alloy expediting department."

At first, Circelli said 'no' to managing the ten-person department. Some of the employees had been there over 30 years and he would be their new boss. Yet Montiero's faith and confidence in him drove Circelli to take his career to the next level. Throughout his years in the alloy expediting department, he was continuously drawn back to help in the scrap refining world, and by August 1995, he took over running the scrap refining department as well.

He said, "I started in '76 with Jelenko, Heraeus bought the company in 1996, and now it's Kulzer, owned by Mitsui Chemicals. Throughout the three owners I've always felt it was the same company with the same values, and I never wanted to change my job. I love what I do. I have traveled and made

Tony Circelli, Kulzer LLC, South Bend, Indiana

What is the hottest thing in dental technology today?

All that is happening with digital impressions, digital workflows, digital records, and 3D printing. With these tools, communication and collaboration will improve and take us into the future.

What industry change would you make if you could?

According to NADL research, the U.S. International Trade Administration data for 2022 reflects that close to \$3.2 billion of \$8.5 billion of the U.S. market is now completed offshore, and there needs to be improved transparency within global outsourcing.

Who had the most influence on your career?

My parents. They immigrated to the U.S. from Italy, spoke no English, and had no money. My father worked in construction, my mother was a housewife and seamstress; they raised three kids and always provided everything we needed. They never missed a day of work and stressed accountability on the job. Along with their work ethic they had a strong love for their family. I strive to be like them in all that I do. I also give credit to my old boss, Tony Montiero, who 40 years ago asked me to become manager of a department, which led to becoming the director of the refining division. His trust in my work ethic and my drive at such a young age played a significant role in my career.

What do you think is the biggest opportunity as the profession moves into the future?

The impact of AI. It benefits design predictability, speed and efficiency, provides greater scalability, and really helps combat the labor gap shortage.

hundreds of friends all over the country. This is a relationship business. A lab or dentist hands over a batch of unknown material and asks us to give them a fair market price for what is in that scrap. That's trust. And that's why we have been around for years because we are honest and have integrity."



Circelli's voice beams when he talks about the joy he still feels when calling clients to tell them the worth of their scrap. Even after 47 years, anyone that knows him still sees the fire within him to succeed, to please the customer, and mostly, to treat others well.

Circelli said, "I think that part of my managerial success is due to the saying, 'treat others as you would want to be treated.' People might think it's corny, but I live by it every minute of the day and it's led me to have a good life. I let people do what they need to do as long as the job gets done, and the response is always positive. Life is complicated enough; no one needs to be unhappy going to work. My kids tell me that I am the only guy they know who loves his job, and I laugh, and then I feel fortunate. I met my wife while we were both working at Jelenko 45 years ago, and it led to a great life and a great family."

When asked his thoughts about the digital changes in the dental laboratory industry, Circelli lightheartedly shares that the refining industry has done the same thing for the last 200 years, melt it, burn it, sift it, blend it, and sample it. The only change was the technology on how the samples are assayed. It is no secret, however, that zirconia had a significant impact on the metal industry. With restorations utilizing more and more non-precious material, Kulzer had to use new technology and techniques in order to ensure that the melts were homogenous in order to get a perfect assay result. It is yet another example of the evolving dental world that will always demand adaptation.

"In 2005 labs were using 85 percent metal in restorations, and by 2022, it was down to 20 percent metal," said Circelli. "Even so, I don't believe the metal refining industry will ever go away. There is still a need and a space. Every day dentists fill up collection jars of crowns and bridges and send them to companies like ours. A good restoration will last around twenty years, so if you go back to 2003, there was a lot of metal going in the mouth. Dental labs still generate scrap in creating PFM for the dentists. Going forward there will be less and less, but I would estimate it will take another 10-15 years to have a bigger impact."

What has left a huge and long-lasting impact was Circelli and Kulzer's decision to support the Foundation for Dental Laboratory Technology (Foundation). Back in 2012, they offered to give two percent of their scrap profits from any NADL-member laboratory back to the Foundation as a quarterly rebate. To date, they have given \$183,987.95 to the Foundation. Just like everything else in his life, it was based on trust and relationships.



"I trusted the NADL and the Foundation and their leaders to do good things for the industry, and over the years, we have seen how our participation has helped in many ways," Circelli said.

Circelli loves all sports (especially the New York Yankees), playing golf, and spending time with Nancy, his wife of forty years, their three children, and five grandchildren. He also acknowledges his close relationships with his two brothers, nieces, nephews, and childhood friends that he has known for over 50 years and still sees to this day. Family and friends clearly mean everything to him. With such an active and happy personal life, the conversation inevitably circles around to what he refers to as the dreaded 'R' word. Retirement.

He said, "Mentally I'm still 18, and through my eyes, I can't believe I'm 65, so here's my pat answer to that question. I'm not digging ditches. I love what I do, I work for a great company, we are making money, the company is happy, and I have my health. I will continue to work until I can't, and after that, we will have a conversation. I have been around the industry for a long time, and my clients and my co-workers are my family. They rely on me, and Kulzer Refining, based on our reputation, customer service, and integrity. Kulzer is the best company in the refining industry. It will always be a trust business, and in return for that trust, I will always do right by them."

With his unassuming nature, steadfast dedication, and unbreakable values, it is clear Circelli ended up like his parents after all.



"I have been around the industry for a long time, and my clients and my co-workers are my family."





Up-and-Coming



Shanon Rogers Torstenbo, CDT, freely admits with a laugh she had no clue about the dental laboratory industry and discovered it by chance. It was 2012 and she had just completed her college pre-requisite courses at Middlesex Community College and needed to pick a degree. She looked through the offered programs, started reading more about dental laboratory technology (DLT), and thought it might be a good match.

Torstenbo said, “I always had an interest in dentistry, but didn’t want to go the hygiene route. I knew I was not ready for the commitment of dental school and although I considered assisting, it did not feel right for me. After high school graduation, I worked in a couple of different fields, as both a nanny and a licensed cosmetologist, but nothing seemed to fit. I already knew what it felt like to not have a match, so when I felt the excitement of this industry, I knew it was a match.”

As a member of the latter part of the millennial generation, she not surprisingly looked to social media for knowledge and support. Through those outlets, she found fellow technicians and study groups who advised and encouraged her throughout her journey. Six months into her DLT program, she visited a local lab and was further intrigued. At the end of her first school year, a dental practice hired her as an in-house technician, and at that point, it all solidified.

“Finding an opportunity in a dental practice was rare, so I felt very fortunate,” she said. “Going to school while at the same time gaining practical experience really helped excel my career path. When I started at the practice, there was one technician doing it all in a full-service lab. He ideally wanted me to take over dentures, but it was overwhelming with only one year of school complete. Yet this opportunity allowed me the rare and valuable opportunity to work in an office with other team members, patients and doctors. I also had the one-on-one mentorship of a well-seasoned technician, which was invaluable as a novice. I had the freedom to learn techniques and to freely choose and



Shanon Torstenbo, CDT, The Lab Dental Studio LLC, Concord, New Hampshire

What is the hottest thing in dental technology today?

Educated, well-rounded technicians who have a solid foundation of knowledge of the basics and an overall understanding of all stages of fabrication. These technicians are extremely versatile which is hot in an industry of fast-moving technological advancements and different manufacturing avenues.

What industry change would you make if you could?

I would prevent formal training programs from closing and open more. With programs closing and technicians retiring, the dental industry needs more educated laboratory technicians.

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"I see how I was pushed outside of my comfort zone and learned from exposure to these unique cases."

use materials, and frequently went to social media to ask questions about cases."

Well, it turns out that the one technician she joined at that practice ended up becoming her husband, Rob. After graduating from the DLT program in 2014 with an associate degree in dental laboratory technology, the practice asked her to work full time and she ended up staying for eight years. During that time, she also became a CDT. After extreme preparation and six hours of travel with lab equipment, she earned her certification in complete dentures, and later, qualified to become a TE.

In 2020, the dental practice was under new management and downsized, and Rob decided to work elsewhere. Even then, it remained a mutual hope to work together again. It took another two years.

"In 2021, a sales representative told me of a local prosthodontist who was looking for a lab technician," said Torstenbo. "At that time, I was ready to learn more. I knew a prosthodontist could provide a different caliber of cases, what I did not know was how super challenging it would be. Patients who go to prosthodontists are generally referred by general dentists due to the complexity, so the treatment plans must be critically analyzed and demand creative solutions outside of the box. Not used to change, I initially wanted to go back to my prior job, but looking back I see how I was pushed outside of my comfort zone and learned from exposure to these unique cases."

► Shanon Torstenbo, CDT, continued

Who has had the most influence on your career?

Rob Torstenbo, my husband, has had significant influence on my life and career. Rob was my co-worker when I started my first laboratory job during the second year of college. Rob has been there every step of my professional career and as a technician himself, is a great support. Rob and I worked side by side for most of my career. Today, we are co-owners who truly enjoy working together.

What do you think is the biggest opportunity as the profession moves into the future?

With the new advancements in digital technology and workflows, many doctors are seeking more in-office technical support. The biggest opportunity I see is the era of in-house clinical lab technicians working directly in-office with doctors and patients.



Although she appreciated the knowledge gained, Torstenbo continued to have the goal of working with Rob as a team again. When he was gifted some benches and equipment from his uncle, a retired crown and bridge/ceramist and lab owner, the desire to open their own lab was irresistible. Both had worked as in-house technicians for years and had forged friendships with many doctors, office team members, and sales representatives, in addition to their social media connections. They already knew they enjoyed working together and it was the right time to pair that with the freedom and control of having their own business.

She said, "Rob started full time at first. I slowly tapered back my day job hours and worked at night. By September 2022, we had retained enough doctors and I officially joined The Lab Dental Studio LLC full time, with a focus on dentures, overdentures, and implant hybrid dentures. One of our biggest fears was not having enough work, but after we opened, it seemed to come naturally. I attribute this to the connections we made in our career paths and getting our name out there attached to quality consistent cases."

At first, it was difficult to transition from being an employee to owner. Sometimes it was hard to maintain a work life balance; initially, they worked seven days a week. Now they make it a point to keep to a schedule and break away from the lab.

She said, "Even after hours, I am always on social media talking to people about dentures and teeth. I don't feel like I am at work, and I hope to make that feeling last."

Talking to Torstenbo casts a brighter light on the future of the DLT industry. The way the next genera-

tion learns, communicates, and advances is different, and it is the future. Through her interactions with online groups such as the Oral Architects of Dental Prosthetics, Dental Laboratory Technicians, Dental Technicians Guild, the former Zeleske's study club, and Ladies of the Mill, she made connections around the world and found inspiration and encouragement to dive deeper and fully commit to the industry. It is her community — a place to seek support, answers, feedback, and interaction. She also found community within the NADL. She is a member of the NADL and JDT Advisory Committee and an author of technical articles published in JDT. She is a recipient of both the Pillar Scholarship and Mark Jackson scholarship and enjoys talking with like-minded technicians at courses and meetings. For those who worry that all may be lost with the next generation of digital everything, it is just about perspective.

“There are so many different avenues to do things in this field to get a similar result, from processing dentures, to milling and printing, and that keeps everything exciting,” said Torstenbo. “Digital will attract the newer generation, but for me, I am also enthralled with the artistry and science behind what I do. I am a medical professional who collaborates with doctors, and I am also an artist. Now that is interesting.”





Volunteer



Rick Peebles, CDT, founder of Peebles Prosthetics Inc., Lakewood, Colo., is in his 50th year as a dental laboratory technician. While he accomplished much, he remains as unpretentious and kindhearted as when he began his career in a small Nebraskan town. It was the late 60s, the age of long hair and beads, and one day Peebles noticed his father, a dentist, making jewelry for his mother. He was fascinated with the process and started to help with his father's wax-ups and crowns and was hooked from that point forward. He went to Michigan for college, but after his father passed away during his freshman year, he needed a change and decided to transfer to the University of Iowa.

Peebles said, "I went to the head of the orthodontics department, Dr. Andreason, and asked him for an introduction to the lab manager at the university. He made the introduction, and I ended up getting a job there. When I went to thank Dr. Andreason, he said, 'You don't need to thank me, just help someone else out in return.' There was something so impactful about that moment, and it has remained my mantra since then."

After Peebles left the university laboratory he went to work for Dick Unsicker, who helped refine his skills in dentures, which is now his certification specialty. After six years, he moved to Denver, working first at a commercial dental laboratory and then a private practice. Throughout these experiences he began to realize that if he was going to work hard, he'd rather work hard for himself. He arranged to work with a prosthodontist as a sole proprietor and opened his own lab in 1984.

He said, "I have always been too stupid to say 'no.' Anything that came in the door I said I would do it. Nothing is impossible, certain things just take a little longer."

His laboratory grew, moving to a new and larger location in 1998, and then again in 2013. By the time Peebles sold the laboratory in April 2022, it was a full-service lab with 75 employees. From the start of his



"Nothing is impossible, certain things just take a little longer."

Rick Peebles, CDT, Lakewood, Colorado

What is the hottest thing in dental technology today?

From my perspective, the hottest thing is the ability to strategically plan the future. We must have the thought process of staying on top of rapidly changing trends and understanding when to change and how to move forward.

What industry change would you make if you could?

I would like labs and dentists to not point fingers at each other, but rather, be honest. The lab/doctor relationship has gotten better but remains a big manipulation factor and we need to reach a higher level to get things accomplished.

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career to the end, Peebles always remained a persistent advocate of giving back.

“Once I realized how many people in the world needed dentures, and the lack of access to care, I knew I had to give back,” said Peebles. “I had the resources, so I did. The laboratory continues to support me even after I retired, providing me a place to do research and development. For example, I just perfected a pour technique that worked well for the dentures we made on a mission. With technology, we will be able to create appliances more cost effectively and create situations to make it more affordable.”

Peebles volunteers his services with the Dental Lifeline Network, Belize Mission Projects, the Colorado Missions of Mercy (COMOM), Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian Reservations, and other small local clinics for the homeless. He is deeply motivated to

use his skill set to help people get back into society, whether they are affected by addiction, homelessness, prison, or simply don't have the funds to afford dental care. As a removable technician, there are ample opportunities to help those in need.

Over the years, finding time for work and family was difficult enough, but Peebles also found the time to volunteer extensively both domestic and overseas. It wasn't always easy, but he learned it was imperative to have the right people in place at the lab. Doing so provided the space to grab ahold of these life-changing opportunities.

Peebles said, “Prior to me learning this, I was working 15 hours a day, five days a week, and on the weekend. It is critical to find the right people and be on the same page. Another learning lesson for me was that finding the right people may require looking at things differently. Years ago, my wife Chris and I interviewed an office manager with no dental experience. I thought it would never work. But she had a good head on her

“Working these missions alongside peers sparks the desire to give back.”

► Rick Peebles, CDT, continued

Who had the most influence on your career?

Definitely my father. We grew up with six kids and it wasn't a matter of if, but where we would go to college. My parents realized I wasn't a book learner but I was good with my hands and smart enough to figure things out, and my father pointed me in the direction of dental laboratory technology. The other person is Dr. George Andreason. He was the head of orthodontics at the University of Iowa and he taught me the importance of helping others.

What do you think is the biggest opportunity as the profession moves into the future?

The biggest opportunity is finding people who can see the future and what is coming down the pike. You must have those people on staff and be willing to pay for them. In a lot of cases, they are more knowledgeable than you, but they will help the business stay ahead of the competition.





shoulders and knew processes and procedures. She ended up being a godsend and is now one of the new owners of the laboratory. Be willing to take chances.”

With the onset of COVID-19, Peebles and his wife, who worked in accounts payable, lessened their hours at the lab. During this transition, the managers assumed leadership and after a couple of years, Peebles decided to retire quietly in 2022. A year has passed, and he still struggles to not say, ‘my lab.’ His pride in the lab and where it is today is obvious, and it is also obvious that he isn’t quite done with all he plans to accomplish. Considering the years he invested, there is still a lot to be learned from Rick Peebles.

“In my 37 years as owner, we had growth every year,” he said. “Yet that growth wasn’t really planned, it was more by default. In today’s industry, strategic planning is critical for success and young, sharp minds are needed. This industry is not just about making money though, it’s about bettering lives. It is extremely sad to see the other side of the coin when viewing the needs of dentistry. Working these missions alongside peers sparks the desire to give back, to do good, and to do right. As volunteers, we do the best we can under the circumstances and do whatever it takes to make it work. At this point in my life, my name is out there, so I decided to start asking for donations. I already knew how to make money, so now I’m getting better at asking for it. My intention is to always support those in need in whatever way I can, and I hope that others are inspired by that motivation as well.” **JDT**

