



Dr. Douglas Campbell demonstrates E4D Cad Cam, which uses computer-aided design to show what X-rays don't.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOEL LERNER

# BETTER THAN THE TOOTH FAIRY

*Advances in dentistry, orthodontics pleasing for patients*

■ BY BILL MCLEAN

Dentist chairs were rock hard 25 years ago. Music at a dentist's office was mostly of the elevator variety, meaning you were in for a double whammy that day if you were afraid of both drills and reliving the thought of "going up" with strangers in a claustrophobic compartment.

And then there was that instrument used to inject Novocain into a most sensitive area.

The gray, shiny thing coming slowly at you was slightly smaller than Seattle's Space Needle.

"Those were the old days," said Dr. David Schmidt of Campbell & Schmidt Cosmetic & Family Dentistry in Lake Forest. "Patients would pretty much get strapped down, and the dentist would say, 'OK, let's get this done.'"

One of the buzz words in dentistry these days is "distractions." The more, the merrier the patient. Patients no longer have to open wide, look up at a white ceiling and brace for intermittent bouts of agony. Many dentists have installed flat screens into ceilings so that patients of all ages can view, while wearing headphones, all kinds of entertainment during lengthy procedures.

"Classic cartoon episodes of 'Tom and Jerry' are very popular," said Dr. Mary Tierney of City Kids Dental North Shore in Winnetka. "Boys and girls enjoy them. We hear the most chuckles when those are playing. We also use neon mouth mirrors on our younger patients. It looks friendlier than metal does."

Adult patients gravitate — and, well, salivate — toward the Food Network shows after getting prepped for crowns and root canals, Schmidt noted.

Patients of Dr. Benjamin Fiss, a Highland Park resident and cosmetic dentist in Chicago, get distracted visually — and aromatically — as soon as they walk into his office located on the Magnificent Mile.

"My office looks more like a living room than it does a dental office," Fiss said. "It's extremely comforting and soothing. We've also taken the dental smell out of it. It's important to diffuse anxieties and create a comfortable environment for our patients."

Dentists themselves also get distracted in a good way.

But that form takes place outside of the office. Technological advances in their field pull them to take continuing education courses. Schmidt figured he has spent about 150 hours a year doing so in recent years. Lake Forest resident Dr. Philip Goduco, a super general practitioner based in Vernon Hills, embraces every opportunity there is to learn what's new in his industry.

"I wish I could live two or three more lifetimes so I could master all the advances in dentistry," Goduco said. "It will keep on advancing. I love it."

Among what he sees impacting dental care is the use of laser technology to detect cavities in conjunction with digital x-rays, as well as advanced CAT x-rays of a patient's jaw and head for placements of implants and straightening mild to moderate crooked teeth in shorter treatment times.

"An exciting advance we've seen in pain management is the administering of a local and topical anesthetic with a computerized delivery system," he added. "It deposits the anesthetic ever so slowly and the end result is either minimal or no discomfort."

"It is definitely a wow factor in our office."

City Kids Dental's Tierney noted enamel has been grown in labs. It's not known exactly how that advancement could combat tooth decay, but one thing is for sure.

"It's exciting to think about," she said.

"The use of that technology for patients," she added, "might be 10 years away."

The last time Fiss used an amalgam (an alloy of mercury and silver) to fill a cavity was 1990. He practices metal-free restoration because the quality of porcelain heads north annually.

"Porcelain gets more and more life-like," said Fiss, whose practice's slogan is, "Changing lives, one smile at a time."

"There's more depth to porcelain," he added. "People smile (after procedures), and they look like they were born with those teeth."

Not all Hollywood stars were born with Hollywood smiles. Tom Cruise and Katherine Heigl are just two of many celebrities who wore braces in the past 10 years. There are four kinds of braces: stainless steel, ceramic, clear aligners and lingual. Lingual braces fit behind the



Mary Tireney and Melissa Lopez help ease fears at City Kids Dental—North Shore in Winnetka

teeth and are unseen by a person's adoring — and regular — public.

"More adults are choosing to get braces," said Schmidt, who lives a mile away from his dental partner, Douglas Campbell. "Back in the 1970s and 80s, kids wore big metal brackets. Those were the 'metal-mouth' years. Now, we're seeing nickel titanium used for braces. It's a very flexible material, with lighter force."

"Advanced systems in braces," he added, "have reduced the time a person has to wear them. Wearing braces for six to eight months, instead of two to three years, isn't so bad. Adults don't mind it if it's only that length of time."

Time well spent is looking for the right dentist, and a good way to start is to call the American Dental Association in Chicago (312 440-2500) and ask for a list of local general dentists. Checking out a dentist's website is also helpful, because it details the dentist's educational background, specialties and philosophies.

"Also ask friends, relatives, co-workers and neighbors about their dentists," Goduco said. "Pick one you think you might like and set up an interview with that dentist. That's a good time to get a feel for the dentist and the dentist's staff, and it's equally important to see if you are a good fit for that particular dental practice."

Fiss encourages folks looking for dentists to seek before-and-after images of patients on dentists' websites. He

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**| Dr. Benjamin Fiss**

eschews pictures of full faces on his site ([www.drffiss.com](http://www.drffiss.com)).

"I only use close-up photos of mouths," he said. "Looking at those before-and-after pictures is truly a good way to judge a dentist's ability."

Some of Tierney's patients arrive for a first-ever appointment well before they have been told about The Tooth Fairy. Tierney's City Kids Dental colleague since 2008 has been Dr. Melissa Lopez. They also treat young patients at a location in Lincoln Square in Chicago.

"We see some who have oral issues at birth, we see high school students, and we see children in between," Tierney said. "I love helping children get off to a good start in oral care and do what I can to alleviate their fears. It's also fun watching them grow up and become young adults."

Tierney and Lopez often receive appreciative gifts after appointments. One of Tierney's favorites is a drawing. It features a cape and an enemy.

"One drew a superhero for me," she said. "He's fighting a cavity." ■