

Artistry meets dentistry in Catholic couple's Frederick periodontal office



Periodontist Dr. Hal Snyder and his wife, Kathy, whose Frederick periodontal office features a great deal of artistry, felt it was important to offer a comforting setting for patients. (Tom McCarthy Jr. | CR Staff)

By Maria Wiering

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FREDERICK – Walking into Frederick Periodontal Associates feels more like entering a grand home than a periodontics office. The ceilings are high and the furniture regal. A chandelier hangs above a fireplace in the reception area. Small, thoughtful amenities abound, such as a beverage bar and outlets for recharging electronics. Even the surgery suites are airy and bright with natural light. After decades of living on military bases, creating a place that feels like home was important to Kathy Snyder, 51, who owns the business with her husband, Dr. Hal Snyder, 56, a periodontist. Kathy spearheaded the office's award-winning design. Because periodontic treatments, which focus on gum health, can cause patients anxiety, the Snyders wanted to create a calming environment throughout the office, they said. Debbie Boulay, a member of the staff, calls the result "Kathy's magic." Parishioners of Holy Family in Middletown, the Snyders lived in Germany for many years while Hal served in the Army, first as a dentist, then a periodontist. The Snyders now live in Braddock Heights, and feature artwork from artists of their adopted state throughout the periodontics office. Watercolor cityscapes from Mick Williams, wildlife works from Marilu Tousignaut, and ceramic and clay sculptures from Laurie Niswander are currently on display, with plans to feature other artists in the future. In January, the Snyders added three icons written by Rebecca LaChance, a Thurmont-based iconographer. The icons – St. John the Divine in Silence, St. Francis of Assisi with the stigmata and a print of the Angel of Hesychia (holy silence) – are grouped on a wall of the reception room. They will be on display through July. LaChance, who has been making icons for less than a decade, said it is important to

her that icons “are presented to the public rather than be ‘hidden away’ in a church.” People of many faiths – and people of no faith – have told her that they are struck by her work, and the office showing gives them a new audience.

The icons are adjacent to one of the Snyder’s prized artworks – a hand-carved sculpture of St. Apollonia, patron saint of dentists, from Oberammergau, Germany, site of a famed Passion play. Many of their office’s permanent artworks were collected during their travels abroad, Kathy said.

The icons and saint statue are subtle ways the Snyders share their Catholic faith at their practice, Kathy said. They have plans for the office to be blessed by a deacon. “Sometimes when you have interesting pieces, it brings out conversation,” Kathy said.

The Snyders moved to Fort Meade in 2000 so their three children – now ages 26, 24 and 18 – could attend Catholic schools.

Seven years later, Hal retired from the Army after 23 years. He bought a periodontics practice in Frederick, and in 2009 he merged it with another practice. Hal has expanded his connection to the Frederick community by working with Mission of Mercy, a Pennsylvania-based, Catholic-founded outreach offering free health and dental care for uninsured and underinsured people.

“We are truly concerned about the health and the welfare of the patient,” Hal said. “Some dental practices today are very much driven by the finances. Although we have to make money to be successful and keep the business going, that’s not a primary motivator for us. It’s taking good care of people and practicing in an ideal way.”

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