

Dr. Albert Natelli – A Dentist Story

When the Student Becomes the Teacher

Dr. Albert Natelli is a man of many talents and a seemingly limitless supply of energy. He thrives by staying active and engaged almost non-stop. On top of being a dentist, he is a high ranking leader in organized dentistry, a two-time member of the Southington town council, former president of the Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the local parks board. He even made a bid for state representative once!

With all this going on, Dr. Natelli is also a volunteer faculty member at the University of Connecticut, where he lectures on diagnosis, treatment planning, and the placement and restoration of dental implants. Ever since entering private practice, Dr. Natelli has had a passion for teaching and ensuring that dental students and residents receive a top-notch educational experience, a passion derived from his own experiences with some truly incredible teachers throughout his life.

Dr. Al Natelli is a native of New Jersey, and for as long as he can remember, he had always wanted to be a doctor. What kind of doctor wasn't immediately apparent to him, but he took some inspiration from his orthodontist growing up. "I really liked my orthodontist," recalls Dr. Natelli. "He was really cool, I loved the office and staff, and always had a good time visiting. I remember thinking to myself one day, 'This is something I could definitely do.'"

Fast forward a few years, and Dr. Natelli has graduated from Miami University, (Oxford, Ohio) with a degree in Zoology, ready to begin dental school at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. It was during dental school that he came to realize orthodontics wasn't for him. After some hands-on experience, he decided that bending wires was not something he could see himself doing every day. However, he did discover a love of practicing oral surgery and decided that would be his focus moving forward.

After graduating from dental school, he wanted to continue pursuing oral surgery. He started a residency at a level-two trauma center where he took first call on head, neck, and facial wounds. "It was incredible training," said Dr. Natelli. "I was part of a great team of responders and received amazing experience. Not just removing teeth, but also with much more complex procedures like fixing broken jaws and repairing facial injuries."

But one year of this wasn't enough for Dr. Natelli. After finishing his year at the trauma center, he began a second

residency working for two oral surgeons. It was here he discovered his truest passion in dental care – planning, placing and restoring dental implants. “After my second year residency, dental implant care became my favorite aspect of dentistry,” Dr. Natelli fondly recalls. “Implant dentistry became a big part of what I did in private practice years later, and a foundation for my philosophy of dental care.” The surgeons he worked under during his residency sent him to a TMJ course at the University where they taught, and gave him opportunities with a variety of other practitioners, including endodontists and general dentists. “They were all phenomenal mentors, and played a huge role in helping me grow into the dentist I am today,” Dr. Natelli said.

Such was the impact of these residency experiences, Dr. Natelli decided he wanted to be a mentor himself, and he soon developed a true passion for teaching. “I was fortunate to have had such incredible mentors and instruction when I was a young doctor,” said Dr. Natelli. “I wanted to ensure new generations of dentists could receive that kind of education.” Thus began Dr. Natelli’s tenure of volunteer lecturing at UConn.

Ready to use his skills in the real world, Dr. Natelli went into private practice after his residencies, working at a few small offices in Connecticut before purchasing Southington Dental Associates in 1995. He then set to work utilizing his many talents and passions to create a truly unique practice, one he designed to be a “one-stop-shop for all dental needs.” And he did so successfully for over 20 years.

Dr. Natelli began to consider the transition of his practice after seeing how dramatically the healthcare delivery environment had shifted in recent years. “All these changes brought with them a lot of uncertainty, and I was concerned as to how it would impact my ability to effectively maintain the practice,” said Dr. Natelli. “At the time, my associate’s brother had recently sold his practice to Midwest Dental. Then one of my acquaintances in nearby Bristol did the same thing shortly after, and I thought to myself ‘I could do that too.’ Which of course he did.

And how has it been going? “I’m delighted,” said Dr. Natelli. “So far my experience with Midwest Dental has been impeccable. They’ve given me so much flexibility, and really helped us improve in many respects. We’re more compliant and have more resources than ever before, and Midwest Dental’s team atmosphere and patients-first approach mirrors our own, which has made the partnership seamless.”

But don’t just take Dr. Natelli’s word for it. The partnership has had a noticeable positive impact in the eyes of his family as well. “My daughter has told me several times since the transition that I seem happier and more relaxed,” Dr. Natelli said. “And it’s true. I’m far less stressed and I just feel like a better person.”

Now stress-free, Dr. Natelli has no intention of slowing things down. Not only does he plan to remain active in his community and continue teaching at UConn, he may try to impact change at an even higher level. “I would love

to collaborate at a higher level with organized dentistry," said Dr. Natelli. "My goal is to help foster continued growth and improvement in the dental industry, and steer it in a positive direction for current and future dentists alike."

Truly, the student has become the teacher.



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