

Springs dentist finds worthy successors



PASSING THE DRILL: Longtime Springs dentist Dr. Stuart Bernstein, center, has handed his practice over to the husband and wife team of Dr. Lester Domingo Haidar and Dr. Elizabeth Marchan Mayo.
GAZETTE PHOTO/THEO KARANTHALIS / FREELANCE

After serving Miami Springs for more than half a century, Dr. Stuart Bernstein has left some pretty big molars to fill.

“My first patient back in 1959 was a jockey from Hialeah Race Track who was bucked off his horse and broke a tooth,” said Bernstein, 80, who set up shop across from Miami Springs City Hall around the same time that Fidel Castro assumed power in Cuba.

So when he retired last year, he was determined to find the most suitable replacements to tend to the patients who affectionately called him “Dr. B.”

“He is old school,” said Arthur Jansik, 60, a local chiropractor and life-long resident. “If he pulled out a jackhammer, I wouldn’t flinch.”

Jansik trusted the man, one of the longest-serving dentists in the county who had tended to the town’s children, parents and grandparents.

During his tenure, he was the office’s accountant, decorator and unofficial psychiatrist.

He welded intricate renditions of wildlife and Bible stories, which were scattered about the office. While getting fillings, for example, patients found solace from a copper Jonah — inside a whale— which hung on the wall. In the waiting room, a 6-foot copper whooping crane danced near the magazines.

“I tried not to hurt people,” said the affable Bernstein, who graduated from dental school in Chicago back in 1956 and then served two years in the Air Force.

So smooth was he with a drill that many of Bernstein’s patients let him drill without Novocain.

Sensing the closeness of these bonds, Bernstein agonized over how to retire without disrupting the lives of his patients. The finest way to honor them, he thought, would be to leave them with “something better.”

So he spent weeks quietly sifting through recommendations and holding on-site interviews until he selected Drs. Elizabeth Marchan Mayo and Lester Domingo Haidar, a husband-and-wife team, to carry on his legacy.

“What they gave up and went through to leave Cuba to practice dentistry in America speaks to their passion for serving others,” said Bernstein, who was amazed at their skill and determination. “Both of them went through dental school — twice.”

Marchan and Domingo earned their first dental degrees 20 years ago in Cuba. When they emigrated to the U.S. in 2004, they had to jump through a series of hurdles before practicing dentistry again. Each one underwent a rigorous course of dental study that included repeating similar classes they had already passed in Cuba years before. Then they had to satisfy residency requirements, pass comprehensive English exams and score high on the rigid U.S. dental boards.

In just a few years, Domingo graduated from dental school with honors from the University of Buffalo, while Marchan graduated nearby from the University of Rochester. During this time, they also became U.S. citizens.

The couple purchased the practice from Bernstein for an undisclosed amount. Bernstein’s longtime dental hygienist retired; his dental assistant, Paula Font, remained.

“We are here to give our best to this community,” said Marchan, who aside from being a dentist also earned a separate certification to be a dental hygienist. “We love and enjoy what we do, have great compassion for people, as well as passion for our profession.”

Bernstein, who drops by the office from time to time to see old friends and share a few laughs, calls the duo the “greatest” gift he could leave his patients.

“These two are what make America the greatest country on earth,” said Bernstein. “I have left my patients in the best of hands.”