

MAIN STREET



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DR. PAUL MATRULLO and his son, Dr. Joseph P. Matrullo, are increasingly focusing their dental practice on cosmetic procedures – from whitening treatments to tooth replacements, crowns and porcelain veneers. The demand for whiter smiles is growing, they say.

PROVIDENCE BUSINESS NEWS

Finding fame with perfect smiles

Cranston dental practice thrives as cosmetic procedures grow popular

BY RYAN MCBRIDE
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COMPANY PROFILE

Dr. Matrullo and Associates

OWNERS: Paul J. Matrullo, DDS, and Joseph P. Matrullo, DMD

TYPE OF BUSINESS: General and cosmetic dentistry

LOCATION: 1280 Park Ave., Cranston

YEAR FOUNDED: 1976

EMPLOYEES: 18

ANNUAL REVENUE: WND

The phone rang 10 minutes before closing on a Friday afternoon early last month at Dr. Paul J. Matrullo's dental office in Cranston. It was a producer from "Dr. Phil," the hit TV talk show that features psychologist Phil McGraw advising troubled guests.

The producer asked the dentist to give an upcoming guest, a 24-year-old Cranston man with anger issues, a winning smile before he appeared for a taping of the show in Los Angeles.

Matrullo agreed to do the work, and within two weeks treated had treated the man's bad case of gum disease and transformed his rotting teeth into a bright white smile.

It was no surprise the show picked Matrullo for that tough assignment. The list of people who have turned to his practice in the past includes TV newscasters, an NBA coach and scores of others wanting whiter smiles with perfect teeth.

And although the dental practice still gets most of its revenue from standard procedures, such as fillings and root canals, Matrullo said the cosmetic side of the business is growing rapidly.

"I think people are paying more attention to their appearance than before," the dentist said, sitting in his office on busy Park Avenue.

Also, he said, people are staining their teeth with steady diets of coffee and wine - and many of those people are baby boomers who have the financial might to pay for cosmetic procedures, which are typically not covered by dental insurance.

Cosmetic dentistry - now making up 40 percent of his business, Matrullo said - includes whitening treatments, applying porcelain veneers to rebuild stained or crooked teeth, and tooth replacements and crowns.

New technologies recently have enhanced many of these procedures. For nearly two years, Matrullo's practice has used the "Waterlase" system, in which lasers energize water sprays capable of removing damaged gum or tooth tissue with lower amounts of painkillers than were required by previous techniques.

A fast-growing portion of his cosmetic practice is its veneering procedure, using special porcelain called "Lumineers" to permanently rebuild stained, gapped or decaying teeth. The office has received 300 requests for the procedure already this year, up from 70 in all of 2005, Matrullo said. And some 50 people already have paid thousands of dollars for the work, triple the number who did so last year, he said.

Studies show cosmetic dentistry is a growing business in urban and suburban areas such as Cranston. The American

Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, a group based in Madison, Wis., reported in 2005 that most suburban practices like Matrullo's had seen cosmetic services jump by more than 11 percent over the year before.

Teeth-whitening procedures have been a major source of growth in cosmetic services at Matrullo's office. "As a rule, anything that will stain a white T-shirt will stain your teeth," said Dr. Joseph P. Matrullo, Paul's son, who joined the practice in 2004.

Patients pay as much as \$600 for a whitening treatment that utilizes a "sapphire" lamp to bleach teeth, or as little as \$90 for prescription-strength whitening strips about four times as potent as the over-the-counter products. Procter & Gamble sells its Crest "Whitestrips" at suggested retail prices of \$24.99 to \$39.99, according to its Web site.

Though the elder Matrullo acknowledged he has seen some over-the-counter whiteners yield good results, he also has seen some bad outcomes. "My findings with the strips are that the [stains] tend to rebound," he said, "so once you start with the strips, you are kind of married to them, because you have to use them for touchup periodically."

At his office, Matrullo said, demand for cosmetic services has grown rapidly over the past five years, and that's the portion of his practice that he and son Joseph have decided to market.

That's why they agreed to give the "Dr. Phil" show's guest about \$10,000 worth of cosmetic work, in return for some TV exposure.

"It'd be good to get a plug for Rhode Island," Matrullo said. "We do good work here - East Coast dentistry is the best." ■