

orthotownSM

exclusively for orthodontic specialists



PDT
Family Matters

page 12

Discussions from Orthotown.com

Lingual Ortho

**Can This Tooth
Be Saved?**

www.orthotown.com



Linda and Fred Van de Perre

Family Matters



by Benjamin Lund, Editor, *Orthotown Magazine*

Paradise Dental Technologies founders Fred and Linda Van De Perre, positioned at the front of the company breakroom, are rallying the troops. Several setbacks have taken their toll on production and have threatened a much-anticipated four-day Christmas weekend – illnesses, surgeries and five burst pipes at PDT’s brand new, 23,000 square-foot manufacturing facility caused by the brutal chill of an unforgiving Montana winter are merely a few of the culprits – but sitting in the middle of this confident group, you’d never know it. Linda’s got the production figures in her hands and sports the kind of encouragement a devoted mother has for her children. Fred’s got enough voice for eight motivational speakers and the energy of a case of Red Bull. Production might be down, says Fred, but they’ve faced situations like this before. “Remember when we made up more than 900 units in one day?” he says. “We can do it! We don’t suck! Say it!”

Like a battalion of green berets, the PDT family roars, “WE DON’T SUCK!” followed by uproarious laughter. They know, come hell or burst pipes, they’re going to meet their quota. Lunch concludes after Fred leads a rousing rendition of an altered “12 Days of Christmas” by *SCTV* characters Bob & Doug McKenzie. Everyone goes back to their posts, fully satiated by the potluck meal, spirits boosted and determined to get the job done – pumped up like students returning from a pep rally. It would be difficult to find a more loyal and fun-loving crew in the entire state of Montana.

Humble Beginnings

Paradise Dental Technologies’ modest and auspicious existence may have officially started in the Van de Perre’s two-car garage, making tools by night and selling them by day, but really it began in 1998 at a trade show in Montreal, Canada. Back then, Fred was one of the founders of Oasis Dental Group in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. He helped invent a distillation alternative called the EzeeKlean 2.5, which creates one gallon of quality water for sterilizers in about four minutes. Linda was a founder and minority shareholder of American Eagle Instruments, Inc., in Missoula, and worked as its quality manager and national sales manager. Her ideas and involvement were critical in the company’s design of the first large-diameter ultra-light instruments for dental hygienists.

At the dental show in Montreal, while waiting at the hotel for their ride to the convention center, they started chatting. Their commonalities were so in synch that by 10:30 that morning Fred proposed marriage right there in the exhibit hall. In less than two years, they got hitched. For two such highly innovative people like Fred and Linda, starting their own company was a natural progression. Frustrated at work and aching for a new direction, Linda told Fred one night, “You know, after all of this, having our own company is going to be *paradise!*”

And so, in February 2000, Paradise Dental Technologies was born. For most, making dental instruments is simply a job – but for the Van de Perres, it’s a passion, and that passion is inherited

continued on page 14



Your employees are the most important part of the business.

by the entire PDT staff, a boisterous group that consistently meets the company's extremely strict instrument standards. From unit strength to ergonomics and even to the ability to keep an edge longer, they're constantly striving to improve their products to be the best in the business. What's resulted, even through the current grueling economy, is an astounding 27 percent upswing in PDT's growth ending 2008. "Even our competitors have told us that we've pushed them to do better," says Linda.

Entirely Made in America

Another major source of pride for PDT is that all of its instruments are 100 percent American made – which might seem odd since Fred is 100 percent Canadian.

When asked why producing an entirely American-made product is so important to him, Fred replies, "My wife, my daughters and my business are all here in America. America's given me everything I love. Why wouldn't I want to give back to the country I love?" When pressed further on the subject the cost of an instrument made in China or Pakistan versus an American-made product, Fred's American pride balloons even further.

"Wouldn't you rather spend 20 cents more on a good ortho flossing product to keep six hard-working Americans employed than save that 20 cents and use the services of overseas vendors with potentially oppressed employees who you don't know?" says Fred. "Any company that tells you that it has to go overseas to be competitive is full of it. It's not about working harder, it's about working smarter! Our hand instruments cost less than our competitors' because we work smarter. People end up in business for a certain amount of years and then they just want to be more profitable. That's when companies might turn to outsourcing," Linda adds, "Your employees are the most important part of the business. Without the employees, you're nothing."

From the materials it purchases to manufacture its dental instruments to the packaging of its products, everything PDT does comes from the United States. Fred says even though the company pays more for the quality of American raw materials, PDT makes up the cost in the efficient production of its products. Citing higher quality

standards and more control of what goes into PDT's dental instruments, Fred and Linda exude massive pride for keeping the company's entire operation in the states. "We're not going to put someone out of a job just because it's cheaper to make it somewhere else," says Fred.

Enter the Platypus

Although it is firmly rooted as a dental hygiene instrument company, PDT made its first big splash in the orthodontics arena with the release of the Platypus flosser in February 2008. Co-developed by Fred Van de Perre and Laura Morgan, RDH, of Austin, Texas, the Platypus is a flossing device for patients with braces that slides underneath the wire to easily reach interproximal and subgingival surfaces. Essentially, it cuts flossing time for orthodontic patients in half.

"If we're not going to bring anything new to the game, we're not going to get into it, but Laura came to us with an ingenious prototype," says Fred. "I personally spent nine months on developing that product to try to engineer it in a way that it could be easily used, manufactured and affordable. We started out with Laura's concept and sat down as a team and decided how to make the product effective and affordable." The Van de Perres were also keenly interested in the Platypus because their daughter, also named Laura, wore braces and abhorred the floss threading process.

"Orthodontic flossing devices are so difficult and time-consuming to use that patients simply don't floss," says Linda. "We wanted to take a look at that and try to make our daughter's life easier. With the Platypus, she can floss in a couple minutes. In fact, her oral hygiene is better now than when she got braces. We're seeing increases in patient compliance go from four percent to 85 percent."

Fred shows me his e-mail correspondence with the grandmother of Denny, an autistic young man from New York who had braces and experienced much difficulty using floss threaders. His hygiene had radically deteriorated and even though his dental hygienist encouraged him to floss more, he couldn't do it.

At one visit Denny's hygienist remembered receiving a sample pack of PDT's

continued on page 16

Everything PDT does comes from the United States.



Platypus flossers. She handed one to Denny, showed him how to use it and in minutes he flossed his entire mouth. Denny's grandmother contacted PDT to ask how she could buy more of the Platypus flossers. Fred sent her several free packs and asked her to report back. Weeks later, Denny's grandmother contacted Fred with the news that as of his last visit to the orthodontist, Denny's dental hygiene had vastly improved and they owed it all to the Platypus.

At the potluck lunch, PDT's Manager of Innovative Products Mark Wells (aka Captain Platypus), announced the current sales of the Platypus flosser surpassed 1.4 million units. "No one is more surprised by the success of the Platypus than us," says Fred. "This product is being driven by the patient. Every week we get e-mails from patients thanking us for inventing it! I get e-mails that'd knock you out, mostly from parents telling us that their floss time has been reduced from eight-to-15 minutes to one-to-two minutes. We got an e-mail from a girl whose challenge is that she has only one hand and it's helped take her oral care to another level. We had no idea how much this product was going to improve the lives of people who have challenges. You're now building a product because it's the right thing to do. That's worth more than the money we make in sales."

A Future in Orthodontics

Seeing a need for better orthodontic tools, PDT is turning much of its research and development focus on improving current orthodontic instruments. "The instrumentation in orthodontics is archaic," says Fred. "Of all of the orthodontic hand instruments out there, there's really no significant ergonomic advantage to any of it. It's also very expensive." Of the orthodontic instruments currently on the market, PDT is looking at developing its own tools for bracket placement, cement removal, debridement, band placement and band removal. "They say we've raised the standard of hygiene/perio instrumentation and orthodontic flossers," says Fred. Linda adds "We're going to redesign orthodontic hand instruments and work with the experts and orthodontists who are using it every day. We want to watch them work and put some prototypes in their hands. We can't do this without the expert opinions of the professionals."

Making existing tools better is always at the forefront, but, like the Platypus, PDT is also interested in developing new products for orthodontics. "We're a factory with R&D," says Fred. "We've got three patented products that we've brought to the market so far. If practitioners come to us with ideas, we can help develop it."

PDT has come a long way in a short amount of time – yet despite its overwhelming success and rapid growth, it remains a family business. Fred and Linda still make sure they are available to take calls from customers personally – something they insist they will do forever. According to Fred, "It's the little things we do like that that make such a long-lasting impact for us – after all, it's the little things that the company was built upon."

To learn more about Paradise Dental Technologies, visit www.pdttdental.com, or call 800-240-9895. ■

So Much More Than a Paycheck

The employees at PDT come from all walks of life. Some have been making dental instruments for decades, others are rookies, but they all say the same thing about working for PDT – it's like family.

"Fred and Linda appreciate the effort that everyone puts into their work here, and they have no problem showing it," says Make Up Supervisor Erik Bratlien. Bratlien has been making dental tools since 1992, and like the Van de Perres, his drive is in producing the highest quality products. "I wish there were more days in the week to get things done here, but I really feel cared for. Makes you want to go that extra mile. Fred and Linda may own the company, but it belongs to all of us."

Jackie Stebbins, one of PDT's expert sharpeners, been with the company for almost two years, but she's already decided she's going to stick with PDT for the rest of her life. "I get excited every time I come into work," says Stebbins. "I even enjoy putting in extra hours here." Stebbins explains that the way Fred and Linda care for their employees means so much more than a paycheck. "Fred and

Linda make it a huge family here," she says. "I would give them my left arm, and if they asked, I'd give them my right arm too. They're so happy to see all of us every day and they're so encouraging. And if something's going on at home, they let us take care of it because, as Fred says, 'Family comes first.'" When Stebbins was first placed in the sharpening department, she was hesitant, but with the relentless encouragement of the Van de Perres, it led to some noteworthy success. "I was struggling for a while, but one day it finally clicked and I sharpened 279 points," she says. "Fred jumped for joy, he was so excited for me. This is the best job I've ever had."

Shipping and Receiving Supervisor Monika Roth's outlook on the future of the company is as bright as it gets. "In five years I'm sure I'll still be here," she says. "It's great to be a part of something that's going to grow and be here a long time. Every day it gets better and better here. PDT is more like home. I'd rather be here than anywhere else." ■

