

PROFILE

# What teeth and Disneyworld have in common

By Heidi Bloch

Remember those painful, tortuous experiences? A sterile office, people clad in white with nary an acknowledgement of your teenage presence, much less your oral pain. Well — things have changed in at least one orthodontist's office in Denbigh.

And this is change that finds kids coming early for their monthly visits and unhappily dragged out by parents.

Upon entering Dr. William Parks' unique and informal office, one first encounters a huge television hanging near the receptionist's desk. Parks' patients are free to tune into the latest episode of their favorite soap opera. Comfortable sofas are as inviting as those in any family room. A large full-wall mural depicts a mountain and lake scene.

A built-in aquarium is surrounded by a hand-painted underwater scene and a black board welcomes new patients. Stuffed animals, most of them larger than some young patients, hang from the walls and await some stroking.

New patients have their photos displayed. And neon lights are part of the decor. But perhaps most unusual is the ceiling.

From doorway to doorway, including the entire treatment area, the ceiling is covered with graffiti — legal graffiti — encouraged by the doctor.

When the braces come off, each teen is asked to leave his mark. Parks even provides a ladder, and his only stipulation is that the message must be signed.

"Sometimes it's neat for me to read what the kids have left. It's a chronology of 10 years — it's therapy for me and jogs memories," Parks said.

His favorite reads, "Nothing improves my hearing better than praise. Thanks, Leslie Knox." Patients are free to wander around, eyes fixed upward, as they attempt to find a free space of ceiling near a friend's already historic rendering.

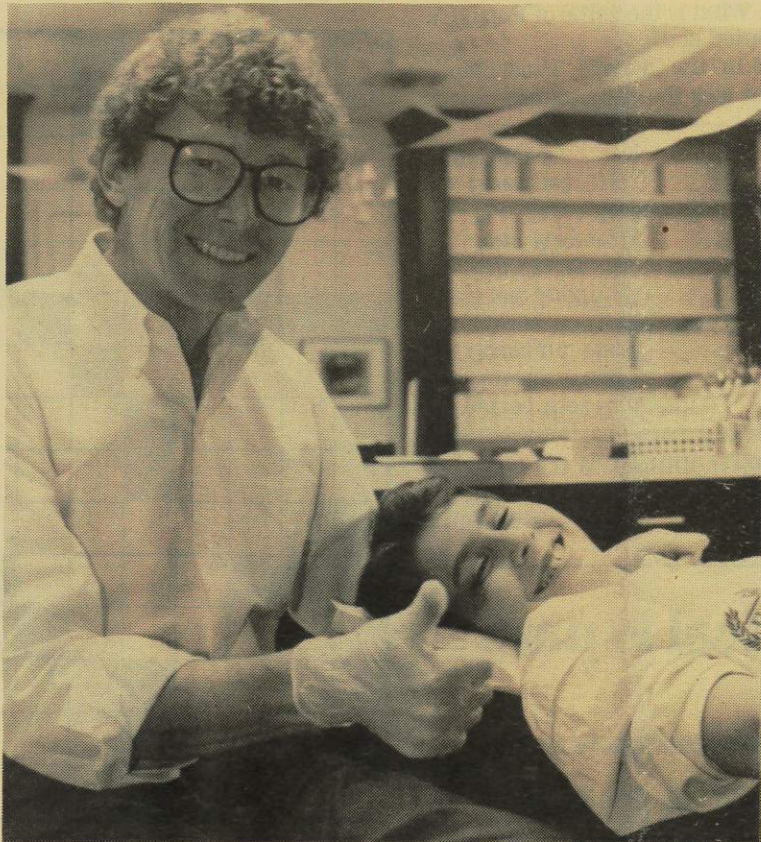
"Everything else I owe to... good genes, good habits, good luck, but, my dazzling smile I owe to Dr. Parks and crew. Thanks, Karen Steveson," reads another inscription.

"I survived two years and five months. Thanks so much, Jennifer Goens."

Parks decorates for every holiday and provides refreshments for patients who make their appointment on a holiday. The radio blares throughout the office and best of all, kids are invited into Parks' private, glass-enclosed arcade, complete with two pinball machines, MTV, and other games.

"When the girls call them out, they come willingly. But when mom calls to go home, they complain," Parks said. "These machines have a million miles on them."

"This is a unique arrangement. I've never seen a room where the reception area is part of the treatment area," Parks said of his design. One large treatment area is equipped with colorful chairs, mobiles and Superman complete with tin grin.



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Dr. William Parks won't see 12-year-old Tony Perez for another two months. There aren't any unhappy people at this orthodontist's office. Below, Eric Ancarrow enjoys the arcade games during his first visit to Parks' office.



"Usually, the doctor is pretty nervous about having a parent nearby, but we welcome them," Parks said. "They can sit and watch closeby, or watch TV, or play pinball, or sit and read. We do that on purpose — for communication."

"A parent can overhear a con-

**"These machines have a million miles on them."**

—Dr. William Parks

versation I might have with a young patient about his dental care. Kids and adults like the openness and the kids like to see their friends. Even some adults prefer not to be isolated in the more conventional treatment area we have.

"I've done this for a long time and I find that kids are less 'up-tight'. This is serious business, but we have fun at it."

Parks acknowledges that health care professionals must understand that service is their product

## A brave new world

By Heidi Bloch

Parents have adapted well to the informal office style of many dental and medical offices today.

Carolyn Ancarrow recently brought her son Eric for his first appointment with orthodontist William Parks.

"I was impressed when he came out to meet us. He didn't have on a white coat. He was more relaxed and didn't give the impression that something was wrong with Eric," she said.

"I can remember medical offices as a child and dreading having my braces put on. As parents, we kind of dread that experience for our kids."

Ancarrow was pleased with Parks' informality and his style. "He directed all his questions to my son. That takes the pressure off of us as parents. It becomes a matter between Eric and his orthodontist. My son liked the fact that Dr. Parks was talking to him, directing questions to him, and writing down exactly what Eric said."

Nine-year-old Eric told Parks that his bottom teeth were "smooshed together." Parks hesitated as he thought how he would spell the description on the boy's record.

Parks' office includes a glass-enclosed video and pinball arcade, neon and bright colors, mobiles and other attractions for kids.

"They don't have a bad attitude even before they start," Ancarrow said.

and considers attitude when he hires new help. His receptionists are equally bubbly about their boss' zest for life.

National statistics show that clearly half of all children could benefit from orthodontic treatment, Parks said. "But we don't see half."

Parks takes new patients on a tour of the office and they are invited to spend time in the arcade. Parent and child watch a video explaining exactly what to expect, and Parks chats with them using

models to illustrate what treatment might entail.

And Parks, understanding child psychology as a parent and as a health care professional, knows that his job requires cooperation from the predominantly young patients he serves.

He is quick to ask his patients, no matter what their age, what they want him to do.

"If a child doesn't know, I give him a mirror. You can't outfox kids today. You have to work with them."

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