

# > Do It Cheap...Do It Well... And Get The Doctor To Pay His Bill



**Gary Spadaro, Sr.**  
*a DLANY profile*

**L**isten, kid. I'm going to give you a lot of work. And I want it done cheap. But I want it done well. And you're going to work real hard. But you're gonna make a lot of money."

That's what the dentist said ... back in 1976 ... to Gary Spadaro, Sr., the owner of Liberty Dental Laboratory in Schenectady, NY.

That doctor was the major inspiration, the primary guiding force, and in some ways, the singular lucky break that Spadaro, Sr., experienced in a highly successful career spanning thirty years as a proprietor of a dental lab.

Spadaro, Sr., was only 27 years old at that time. But he never forgot the lesson contained in the dentist's remark. In fact, he's lived by that lesson ever since, with an almost obsessive focus on quality and on continually finding new ways to do lab work ever more cost-efficiently.

It's not surprising that Spadaro, Sr., has flourished in the dental lab business, given the motivation he had to get started in this field.

While in high school, his then girlfriend issued him an ultimatum—if he was to have any hope for love and marriage with her, he had to make something of himself, like her uncle the chiropractor, to whom she introduced him. Worried sick about losing her, Spadaro, Sr., sought the uncle's advice. Surprisingly, the uncle did not suggest chiropractic school. Inexplicably, he took out a book from the library, a home study course, on dental lab technology, and said to the teenage Spadaro, 'why don't you take this course with me.'

Talk about miracles. Spadaro looked it over, liked it, took the course, completed it, loved it.

As soon as he graduated high school, he researched dental lab trade schools and applied to two. When his mom nixed the idea of California, he attended school in Manhattan for 36 months, where he totally flourished.

With his dental lab technology degree in hand, he worked in var-

ious labs in New York City for a couple years, then returned to Albany where—yes!—he married that same high school sweetheart—who, today, is his much loved wife of 33 years.

Working in the Troy, New York, area as a young lab tech, Spadaro, Sr., found the older technicians to be very guarded, if not secretive, about their techniques—hesitant to share their skills for fear of losing their work. At one point, the young Spadaro was so frustrated in his efforts to apprentice that he jumped up on a bench one day and shouted, "I don't want to steal your work, I just want to learn."

After bouncing around to various labs for a couple years to learn all he could, Spadaro bought some used equipment in 1975 and opened his own dental lab in his home basement. That was a terrible year for a new business start-up—the U.S. economy was in the doldrums of a dreary recession where unemployment, interest rates and inflation were all at record-setting highs.

Nonetheless, Spadaro, Sr., walked in the doors of dental practices, showed samples of his pieces and asked for work. The first client he got, he still has—some 30 years later. And that's how he picked up business, 1 client at a time, by walking into doctor's offices. After about a year, when his lab consisted of himself, a part-time technician, and a delivery person, he stumbled upon the dentist who said, "Listen kid ..." —Working 16 hours a day to keep up with all the business that dentist gave him, his billings soon grew to \$12,000 a month.

And over the ensuing years, Gary Spadaro's Liberty Dental Laboratory grew to a high of 33 technicians.

Looking back over the past 30 years, Spadaro, Sr., has found that some things in the industry have changed, and some have not.

Dentists, for example, have not changed in his opinion. Today, they are more educated, but as far as how they are dealing with the patients, with the labs, with their people skills in general, nothing

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Dental Laboratory Association of the  
State of New York, Inc.

### OFFICERS

#### President

Gary Spadaro, Jr.  
Liberty Dental Laboratory  
(518) 344-5372

#### Vice President

Raymond Rayeski, CDT  
Highland Acres Dental Labs Inc.  
(716) 646-0087

#### Secretary

Mark Viscusi  
(518) 370-2217

#### Treasurer

Norm Friedman, CDT  
(845) 336-2222

### CONTACT DLANY:

Capital Plaza — Suite 8  
1925 Curry Road  
Schenectady, NY 12303  
Telephone: (518) 355-3183  
Toll Free: 877-DLANY65  
Fax: (518) 355-5812  
E-mail: Newsletter@dlany.org  
www.dlany.org

### STAFF

*Executive Director*  
Anthony F. Mayer

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## > A Showcase Lab under Construction in Farmingdale, New York

# The Dental Lab of the Future

It started with the UPS driver. One day, out of the blue, the deliveryman asked, "Hey, Lenny, are you looking for more space? There's a guy just a couple blocks from here with a large building that he's looking to rent out." And that's how it all began.

After Lenny took a tour and found himself incredibly impressed with the ground floor, 12,000 sq. ft. facility, the owner said. "Gee, I'm not sure I really want to rent it. I think I'd like to sell it." Negotiations went unusually well—Lenny says the guy was a proverbial sweetheart, a real gentleman throughout the discussions leading up to a smooth closing on the transaction. Once a factory, this Farmingdale, New York, building will be transformed into a virtually brand new facility when the restoration is complete and it becomes the new home of Marotta Dental Studio, Inc. which has been in Farmingdale for the past 26 years.

The new Marotta dental lab will reflect the personality of its owner—it will function on the leading edge of the dental lab industry, a veritable showcase of the dental lab of the future.

Lenny Marotta likes to stay ahead of the times. Unlike some owners who enjoy life in the office, pushing pencils, as they say, and going to business lunches, Lenny likes being on the bench, shoulder to shoulder with technicians, the consummate "hands-on" kind of entrepreneur. As a result, the new lab will be built with up-close input from his technicians—in fact, it's fair to say that it will be built around them. In addition, Lenny is getting extensive consulting assistance from doctors and vendors to the dental lab industry from all around the U.S. And because of his close, special relationship with SUNY (State University of New York) at Farmingdale, Lenny is getting University help as well.

Among the notable features of the new Marotta lab will be:

- **State-of-the-art in CAD/CAM systems.** While Lenny believes that CAD CAM "is not there yet" in terms of its capacity to replace the handiwork, the craftsmanship of the top of the line technicians—"we're talking microns of fit, here" Lenny says—he does strongly venerate a lot of the qualities that computerized design and production capabilities bring to a dental lab, such as the ceramic techniques, the sintering process, its extremely clean and accurate milling, and so forth.

- **Stereolithography.** By law, the lab cannot operate a CT scanner or an MRJ machine. But the new lab is in partnership with a doctor whose break-through scanning capabilities emit 80% to 90% less radiation to the patient than a regular scan. As part and parcel of this doctor-lab relationship, Stereolithography will be a cornerstone of the new Marotta lab, enabling them to get into the Bio-medical modeling field.

For the benefit of interested readers, the DLANY Newsletter editors provide a brief discussion of stereolithography in the textbox that follows this article.

In concert with their doctor and vendor partners and their biomedical modeling capabilities, the new Marotta lab will be involved in such procedures as cranio-facial restorations, extraordinarily difficult implants for cancer patients, orthodontic implants for Down's syndrome clients, and other complexities that currently are the exception but may soon become the rule with labs like the new Marotta facility.

- **Milling machines and memory alloys**—Working with New York University (NYU) and three outside bioengineering companies, the new Marotta lab will be running tests on bio-materials, and

vice versa, the outside partners will be doing biomedical testing for Lenny.

If this sounds a bit anomalous, it's important to note that Lenny Marotta is a Clinical Assistant Professor at NYU, in their Division of Restorative & Prosthodontic Sciences, in the Department of Biomaterials of the NYU College of Dentistry. Interestingly, while he is the only non-doctoral prof in that specific area, nonetheless he runs the Advanced Education Program in Prosthodontics for NYU's Department of Implant Dentistry.

Various new technologies will be contributed by sundry vendors, the nature of which, for understandable reasons, cannot be fully disclosed until the deals are sealed.

From its attractive setting on a tree-lined cul-de-sac in an industrial-park-like campus, the new Marotta lab will also house:

- **A theatre-in-the-round lecture facility**, with audience capacity for 35 and the latest in computerized and traditional A/V presentation equipment,
- **Teaching facilities** for courses the lab will offer not only to technicians but for doctors as well.
- **Classrooms** specially designed for the oral hygiene training programs that the new lab will be offering,
- **A library,**
- **A computer learning center** being set up by outside manufacturers who will not only provide the equipment but will also furnish many of the resources needed to support and run the center on an on-going basis,
- **Special equipment from SUNY Farmingdale's Dental Engineering department** that will enable the lab to do cranial-facial reconstruction with the aid of a stereo lithographic skull—this aspect of the lab is purely "dental-driven" in the sense that dentists themselves will be using the facility as well as being actively involved in its design.

Once again, a clarifying note may be in order: Lenny Marotta is a Visiting Professor in Dental Engineering Education, in the SUNY Farmingdale Institute of Manufacturing Research of the School of Engineering Technologies, where he is developing a number of programs, and is gradually moving the Institute—he hopes—in the direction of designing specialized, accredited training programs for dental lab technicians.

With all that going on in his life, one has a right to ask the simple question as to when Lenny gets time to run his lab. Well fortunately, Lenny is able to devote considerable time to the design and construction of the new lab and to the development of its various showcase programs because he is blessed with outstanding help in running his business—his wife, Carol, and his right-hand Associate/General Manager, Stephen Pigliacelli, do "nothing short of a fantastic job" (quote, Lenny) in helping him shoulder the burdens of being a lab owner-operator.

Wishing he were 20 years younger so he could build the next generation of dental lab that will come after this leading edge lab he's now building, Lenny sums up his passion for his new showcase lab with these simple words:

"How do I feel about the dental lab industry, do I like the work I do? No, I don't just like it—I love it."

The new Marotta dental lab is expected to be open and operating in January 2005.

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## What Is Stereolithography?

Stereolithography is a rapid-prototyping process which produces a physical, three dimensional object, a conceptual model or a master pattern from a computer model, namely from a "3D CAD file" or master model. A stereolithography machine uses a computer controlled laser beam to cure a photosensitive resin, layer by layer, to create the 3D part. A pre-production lithographic prototype greatly enhances the geometric visualization of the part/product. Stereolithography is fast, allowing prototypes to be made in a matter of days, and the complexity of the model is seldom a factor. The benefits of Stereolithography include:

- Crisp, highly-detailed pieces,
- Speed of delivery (usually 2-3 days),
- Tolerances within .004"/inch. Stereo lithographic technology

can be employed in making prototypes for:

- Aesthetic & conceptual models
- Parts requiring detail & accuracy
- Master patterns for castings and secondary processes
- Medical models.

Stereolithography master models can also be used for master patterns for metal castings and are easily modified to accommodate last minute changes. Additionally, the models can be used for photo-optic stress analyses as well as dynamic vibrational analyses, which further extend engineering design capabilities.

Stereolithography is actually **Rapid Modeling (Prototyping)** since the objects generated from existing photo-sensitive resins or photo polymers do not have the physical, mechanical or thermal properties typically required of end use production material. There is much ongoing research and development in the area of durable materials.

Rapid Prototyping is the next step in fast, cost effective part production—it is cutting edge technology, which can be applied to almost every industry, including oil refining, petrochemical, power, marine, medical, and dental, etc.—a practical/useful modeling process in many situations.



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## > Do It Cheap...

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has really changed all that much.

The Industry, however, has changed dramatically in Spadaro's view. So many different procedures, so many different ways of doing things. It's difficult to keep up—but, Spadaro cautions, "You have to keep up. You must maintain quality. And you must hold down prices. To do that, you absolutely have to keep pace with the latest innovations, the newest inventions and the hottest developments being introduced into the field. It's a whole different world out there."

### The challenges facing our industry in the year 2005?

Clearly, the shortage of technicians—qualified technicians—is the greatest challenge facing our industry, according to Gary Spadaro, Sr. And the second greatest goes right along with the first, namely, training technicians. And the third biggest challenge follows logically from the first two — finding the human and other resources needed to do technician training. Not surprisingly, the next pressure on the industry goes right along with the first three—the pressure on lab owners and technicians to keep up with what's going on, to keep educated, to sustain a climate of continuing professional education.

### After 30 years in the business, what's the greatest headache a lab owner like Gary Spadaro, Sr., experiences?

There are things that Gary Spadaro, Sr., really likes about this industry. It's been good to him and his family, it has given him an enormous sense of completion, of fulfillment—he is one of those rare people who can honestly say that he loves what he does and does what he loves. For that reason, on just about any day you might stop by Liberty Dental Lab in Schenectady, you will find Gary Spadaro, Sr., the owner, puttering around, making dental pieces, which he still likes very much to do.

There are, however, things he dislikes—for example, if he had had more resources in the early years of his lab, both financial and human, it might have been a lot easier to get to where he is today, and, who knows, but possibly his Lab might well be a lot larger than it is today. Then, too, there are the day-to-day problems that every lab faces, such as finding, training and retaining quality technicians, responding to the ever-increasing downward pressures on prices, and so forth.

### But the biggest headache?

The biggest headache, from the business side of the lab business, in Gary Spadaro, Sr.'s opinion, is collections—getting the dentists to take care of their accounts payable to the labs.

"If you can get a good group of people, and you can train them to be good—top notch—lab technicians, and you train what you have to train in, then a lab works as a business, and can work really well as a business, on one condition: if you can get the doctors to pay their bills.—That's my biggest problem," says Gary Spadaro, Sr., of Liberty Dental Laboratory, Schenectady, NY.

### The state of the Dental Lab Industry in 2005?

Even with all the problems a lab owner faces these days, Spadaro, Sr., finds the industry to be in excellent condition. "Patients are becoming more educated in what they want, and are being better served in terms of their needs, even as they demand more," Spadaro remarks. "If lab owners and technicians keep education as foremost in their labs," he adds, "and if they never lose sight of customer service as the essence of the business they are in, then this industry is in good shape."

## > In-Coming DLANY President, Gary Spadaro, Establishes Direct Communication Line With NY State Dental Association Board

Looking to hear from every major group in the dental world, the New York State Dental Society (NYSDA) invited representatives from all the outside industries that comprise the oral-dental team, to attend their September 17th Council (Board) meeting. In calling this convocation, NYSDA's intent was to learn what organizations in our industry are working on, so NYSDA can consider where the various dental associations can support each other.

DLANY was represented by in-coming DLANY President, Gary Spadaro, Jr., of Liberty Dental Lab in Albany, NY, who was given an especially warm welcome as the first DLANY officer in a long time to be in direct communication with the NYSDA Council.

In his remarks, Spadaro talked about the role the dental lab plays in the continuum of dental health care, how labs are essential in the same way pharmacies serve as handmaids to the physicians. That's why, he emphasized, close communication and interaction between dentists and labs are vitally important to both groups. Spadaro proposed that the NYSDA and DLANY set up a program for exchange of information between dentists and dental labs via the NYSDA and DLANY Newsletters, on a regular basis. The idea was well received.

Spadaro indicated that, working together, the NYSDA and DLANY can be at the forefront of defending issues where the dental labs and the dentists hold common ground or where they can come to each other's aid. Using the NY State Sales Tax issue as an example, Spadaro indicated how the labs can be supportive of NYSDA efforts to remove laminates, inlays and onlays from the roster of sales taxable items—in making his point, Spadaro borrowed an analogy from DLANY previous Executive Director Mark Polevoy, about coffee and coffee cups—they are both a part of what you pay for, and you can't possibly take the coffee away without the cup, it's an integral part of the whole. Remarking on temporaries, Spadaro threw out the possibility of our adopting new nomenclature, the "Class B crown," in order to establish the legitimacy of the temporary as a non-taxable item.

In wrapping up his remarks before the NYSDA Convo, Spadaro raised an ominous note regarding the paucity of young people going into the dental lab field. He quoted statistics from an ADA Research project indicating that over 60% of dental lab owners and technicians, especially in the field of dentures, are over 55 years old. (Cfr., *Dentistry Today*, September 2004.) ADA representatives at the meeting indicated keen recognition of the problem—in fact, one ADA member told the story of a lab owner who said to his lead technician, "You know, you can't possibly retire until I do."

Spadaro pointed to a major Public Relations problem that starts with the consumer in the dentist's chair who doesn't have a clue that a lab makes the things the dentist puts in the mouth. Because the public doesn't know the dental lab technician exists, fewer and fewer young people are entering the profession. Consequently, Spadaro opined, outsourcing may take over this \$7 Billion a year industry, with the result that the lab owner of the future may be a Dental Broker who negotiates contracts between foreign labs and U.S. dentists. With so much growing demand yet diminishing human resources in this country, the dental broker may be the one who goes overseas, makes contacts with dental labs, and returns home to sell outsourced dental lab services.

A number of dentists at the September 17th gathering, indicated they are pleased with the work they get from Philippine and other overseas labs — that porcelain is porcelain whether made for US or Chinese use. At the same time, some dentists remarked that the quality of artistry, the craftsmanship, does matter, and hence the issue is a muddy one for them. In counterpoint, Spadaro offers the thought that, whether on domestic or foreign soil, the lab of the future, with ever-advancing technology, may increasingly become a pure manufacturing center, and less and less an artist's studio, except perhaps at very small labs. Apparently, dentists feel sympathetic to both sides of the issue—they see the problems coming in the industry's future, yet are swayed by the proposition 'Why not pay less if you can get identical raw material with comparable workmanship.' Take a look, Spadaro counsels, at the PDA website, the number of overseas facilities receiving PDA approval to do dental prosthetics—it's comparable to the number applying for computer work.

In closing, Spadaro indicated there might be a major paradigm shift coming to the dental lab profession—a dramatic change in our answer to 'Who are we?' He concluded with the suggestion that the entire dental world begin facing the question, 'How are we going to handle the inevitable change that's coming soon to the dental lab industry?'

Other presentations at NYSDA's September 17th Convo were made by:

- **The Public/Private Partnership in Oral Health Care**, a group that works closely with the NYS Department of Health. The Partnership seeks to foster commitments from doctors of dental science to accept Medicare and Medicaid payments for their services.

- **The Adirondack Rural Health Network**, serving areas with little or no healthcare providers. They promote the opening of dentistry practices "in the woods" — i.e., in rural areas. Although not a part of their presentation, their remarks stimulated questions like:

- Can we find dental labs willing to help these rural areas?
- Is there special federal or state funding for a dental lab willing to go and serve areas where there are "more deer than people"?
- Will financial grants be offered to labs willing to do this work, with the understanding that certified dental labs opening in these areas would set special pricing (discounted rates) for their rural consumers?

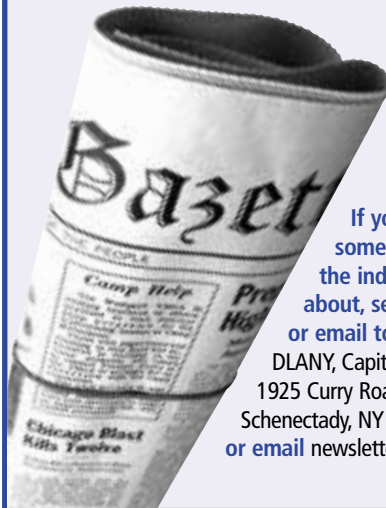
- **The Dental Hygienist Association**, which was highly praised for its show-and-tell. Among other issues, they advocate that dental hygienists be permitted to specialize in more levels of dentistry work—that "extended duties" be established so hygienists can carry more of the provider work load, more pieces of the dental care pie, such as cancer screening tests.

- **NYS Assistance Association**, a relatively newly licensed NYS Association of Dental Assistants, advocating not only that all Dental Assistants be licensed but that there be a laundry List of areas licensed Dental Assistant are permitted to do. By default, areas not on the List would be work the Assistants could not do. Some attendees expressed fear that this could present problems for dentists if the use of the List is pushed to an extreme, as in the case of the Philadelphia building maintenance workers who would not change light bulbs because it was overlooked on the list of duties they can perform. Some in the industry worry that more harm than good may

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# EXTRA, EXTRA...

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## Sterngold Announces ERA Implant Certification Course Schedule for 2005



Attleboro, MA- Sterngold announced today that they are offering four ERA Implant Certification Courses in 2005, directed by Joe L. Carrick, D.D.S of Houston, Texas. These one-day courses feature clinical lectures, as well as a live surgery. The courses will be held on June 25, July 30, September 10, and October 22 at the Amara Institute in Stillwater Minnesota. The Amara Institute, owned by Valley Dental Arts, is a state-of-the-art facility that offers the most advanced educational, technical and operatorial experience possible.

This course is designed to give participants the knowledge and confidence to utilize the new ERA Implant System and to train other clinicians on its various applications. The protocol for the ERA Implant procedure will be the highlight of the course. The program will also discuss and identify the market potential for the innovative 3.25 mm ERA Implant that has been approved by the FDA for permanent application.

The fee for the course is \$895. This fee includes dinner and hotel accommodations for one night on Friday and meals during the course on Saturday (breakfast and lunch). Eight (8) CE Credits are available. Availability is limited. Register today by calling Rachel Jefferson at (800) 243-9942 or (508) 226-5660, or email [rachel.jefferson@sterngold.com](mailto:rachel.jefferson@sterngold.com). For more information on these courses or the ERA Implant System, visit Sterngold's state-of-the-art e-Commerce site at [www.sterngold.com](http://www.sterngold.com).

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## > An ounce of prevention can save you thousands of dollars in legal fees... Workers Overtime and Discrimination Issues

**L**ab Owners and Managers: Here is a nightmarish story of what actually happened to a lab owner, and it could happen to you!

A technician had been employed with a dental lab for about 10 years, when the lab was bought by two partners who merged it into their lab. The new owners kept the worker on staff after the merger, though they were advised that he was, at best, a “fair to midland” technician. Time went by. After the worker had been with the new owners for about six years, he got some advice from an attorney that he was being “ripped off” by his employers—specifically, he was told that he should have been paid overtime during all those years he’d worked at the lab. With the help of the attorney, the worker filed a law suit against the lab.

The litigious worker started logging his time, and on the basis of the log he kept for a number of weeks, his attorney calculated that he was owed O/T pay of \$55,000. They brought their case before the NY State Department of Labor (DOL).

Upon investigation, DOL’s immediate questions to the owners were:

- Where’s your time clock?
- Where are your time cards?

Since inception, the partners ran their lab on a piece work basis. Technicians were given a set amount of work to do per day, and paid a set amount for completing it. Technicians were free to set their own hours, and they did. Most of them enjoyed the lifestyle that this arrangement afforded, enabling them to come in late or leave early on any given day. The benefits included the technicians to meet their personal and family needs. After 9/11, where there was not enough work to distribute, the owners nonetheless paid their workers a full salary, since worker productivity was not at fault. Conversely, when, on occasions, technicians were asked to come in and do ‘over quota’ work, such as on a Saturday, they were paid a premium, calculated at a full day’s pay for doing just \_ the routine daily quota.

Not having time clock or cards to show DOL, the owners explained the honor system that was in effect at the lab for many years, and how it worked. DOL studied the matter, and recommended a settlement of \$27,000.

Going back over the records carefully, including personal days off, sick time, vacation, etc., the lab’s accountant came up with a figure of \$10,100 as the max that could possibly be due to the suing worker, assuming one accepts the premise that his alleged “extra hours” were in fact entitled to overtime. DOL studied the numbers, and

recommended that the worker accept the \$10,100 offer, and his attorney signed a statement to that effect.

However, upon learning that the \$10,100 would be subject to tax and child support deductions, the attorney reneged and asked to re-open negotiations.

At the same time, the lab’s attorney had contacted the employee’s nephew, who drove in and drove home with him every day, and learned that the hours being claimed were bogus—that the worker had been abusing the honor system all along. The DOL investigator was asked to speak with the nephew—the nephew told his same story to DOL.

At that point, DOL urged the worker and his attorney to accept the \$10,100 offer.

Because they refused, the DOL investigators sent a report to Albany indicating “no conclusion” to the case.

Based on the “no conclusion,” Albany ruled that the lab should pay the employee \$75,000, plus penalties.

Obviously, the lab’s attorneys are appealing that ruling, and the Manhattan-based DOL investigator to whom the appeal was assigned has just requested his second 30-day extension of time to investigate the facts, and that’s where the overtime pay case stands.

While all this was going on, the worker decided to file an additional (second) law suit, in which he alleges he was addressed in a demeaning way with a racially slurring reference to his Hispanic ethnicity. The lab owners vigorously contested this allegation was wholly false, and won the first

round. The latest move is that the worker’s attorney filed an appeal of the ruling, with the NY State Supreme court. That’s where the matter as of this writing.

If all were not bad enough, this worker introduced another lab employee to his attorney. The second employee filed a suit claiming:

- A sexually suggestive comment was made to her in front of one of the doctor customers.
- She had not been given a raise in 5 years.
- Her W-4 form has been falsified.

The latter two claims have been dismissed based on the preponderance of the evidence to the contrary. As to the sexual comment allegation, the lab owners are moving to defend themselves rigorously, refusing to budge on their position that the allegation is neither fair nor accurate, and determined to vindicate their innocence.

Thus far, the lab owners incurred \$75,000 in legal—and that number grows every day.



## PALLADIUM

Prices based on London Price Fix  
2nd Wednesday of the month

Months	2004 \$ troy oz	2005 \$ troy oz	'05/ '04 + or (-)
Jan.	219.00	189.00	-30.00
Feb.	236.00	182.03	-53.97
March	264.00	197.99	-66.01
Apr.	320.00	198.00	-122.00
May	241.00		
June	228.00		
July	224.00		
Aug.	214.50		
Sept.	209.00		
Oct.	212.00		
Nov.	213.00		
Dec.	207.75	180.00	-27.75

## GOLD

Prices based on Englehard gold fabricated price  
2nd Wednesday of the month

Months	2004 \$ troy oz	2005 \$ troy oz	'05/ '04 + or (-)
Jan.	419.50	424.15	+4.65
Feb.	427.44	423.35	-4.09
March	421.66	435.00	+13.34
Apr.	419.03	426.13	+7.1
May	402.67		
June	407.57		
July	435.53		
Aug.	424.81		
Sept.	436.22		
Oct.	443.54		
Nov.	433.40		
Dec.	431.92	471.16	+39.24

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# > The Changing Face Of Our Industry: Young Technicians Speak Out: DLANY Holds Young Technicians Forum



With lab experience ranging from less than 1 to as many as 9 years, a group of eight young technicians came together in a Focus Group to discuss the following questions posed by DLANY:

- What do you think are the "hot button issues" facing the dental lab industry today?
- What are your thoughts on Outsourcing?
- How do you view the future of the Dental Lab Industry?
- What Would Young Technicians Like To Say To Lab Owners Today?

Here is a summary of thoughts shared by Young Technicians in the DLANY Forum.

## What do you think are the 'hot button issues' facing the dental lab industry today?

- **Education**—Organized education does not prepare the technician for the real world. We need apprenticeship programs. We need an alternative, supplemental approach to educating the technician—people need to know what a dental technician is, as opposed to being "the silent partner in the dental health care world" as we are today. Education has to begin with educating the public about who we are and what we do. Education has to begin with educating young people about the profession of dental lab technician. Education has to begin with educating all of us in the lab industry on what the education of a technician really needs to be. Education has to prepare the lab technician for the job that they will be called upon to do in the lab. Education has to prepare the lab technician for communication with the dentist, and to prepare the technician to be a veritable partner to the dentist in the dental health care world, not the silent partner. Education has to be about giving the technician "the guts" to learn how to speak with a dentist and not be afraid of their partnership with the dentist. Education has to be about the MDT program and programs that are like it—more technicians need to be educated about these programs and about why they—all technicians—should partake in these programs.

Working in a dentist's office lab, one sees a lot of communication back and forth with the technicians.—It's not just the technicians; it's the dentists as well who want to see schools teaching technicians what's most important today, such as the aesthetics.

- **Lack of qualified experience**—Graduates of our schools do not have what labs are looking for or what labs want. Graduates are prepared in theory, but lack experience, and are really disappointing to the labs. They cannot work in a lab without experience. In school, you might spend 1 whole semester doing 1 case—in a lab, you get 5 days, max, if that, to do a case.

- **Hiring Practices**—Labs are not hiring the educated, skilled workers they need to be hiring. They are hiring people off the street to do just a single, menial, routine task, like a robot would do—they are hiring low paid human robots. Instead, labs should be going to the schools, getting fresh technicians, college graduates—labs should be asking current employees for recommendations, instead of taking almost anybody off the street. Labs need to do more research, get better quality help.

- **Lack of room for growth**—When you go to apply to a lab as a technician, they don't ask you questions about your education or background or skills or talents. They ask you, how many can you do

in an hour or a day. They sit you down and say, Try one and show us what you can do. They'll hire their cousins, aunts, uncles, whomever, without any training whatsoever, if these people are willing to sit there all day and do the same thing over and over, day after day. In such a position, in such a field, there is no room for growth.

- **The relationship between the dentist and the technician**—is not a very good relationship, in many instances. And that's a problem, a major issue. Anyone who works in a dentist office sees a lot of crowns going back and forth—this one doesn't fit, that one the shade is off, and so on, and so on.

## What are young technicians' thoughts on outsourcing?

As incredible as it may sound to many 'older' folk in the industry, some young technicians are not familiar with the term Outsourcing, others know of the term but are not sure what it means, while other young technicians distinguish between "domestic" and "foreign" outsourcing. While some are not sure how they feel about the practice, others are neutral on domestic outsourcing but quite negative on outsourcing to overseas labs.

Some Young Technicians feel strongly that Outsourcing is "horrible"—their word. "Horrible," they say, because many, maybe most, labs in the U.S. already have the skilled technicians needed to do the work that the dentists and patients require, and already have good, established relationships with dentists who know the lab's work. When lab work is outsourced, 9 out of 10 times the outsourced work has to be fixed, which is a waste of time and effort—at least, that's the experience of one young technician. This young technician is aware of a lab that outsources to Florida, and it's the "most horrible work" he's ever seen. The lab in question says it's saving money by doing this outsourcing, but this technician doesn't think so—in fact, he goes so far as to bet that, if you compute the time spent in fixing the Florida work—the "wasted time and effort," as he calls it—there probably is no net/net savings being realized.

A young technician whose lab was sold to a Canadian company expresses similar sentiments. Coming from the Rochester area, this technician says she "has seen the effects of outsourcing first hand—how the Rochester economy is suffering because of it." She argues against it on the basis of quality—"the doctor will pay anything if the quality is good."

Other young technicians point to the inconsistency that results when dental work is outsourced. Too many hands dealing with the same case is not good for the quality of work, and often proves to be a waste of time, they say. Furthermore, when outsourced work comes back from the vendor, it still has to be quality-control-checked, it still has to be fixed, and it still has to be finished. So, this technician asks rhetorically, why send it out? While lab owners see the practice as cost-effective, this young technician doesn't see it—what she sees instead is that the dentists are not getting the quality of work they want.

One young technician points to the fact that owners, understandably, are always looking to save money. This technician is aware of a huge lab in Puerto Rico that makes dentures for \$135. As a result of outsourcing, in the mind of this young technician, "little by little, our field is going to be disappearing." And why is that the case? It's because, this technician says, "they don't want to pay me what I

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

really deserve to be paid—they'd rather pay some one far less qualified, to give them far inferior quality work, for far less money."

"Outsourcing is a serious issue," says one of the Young Technicians with whom we spoke. When labs do this, "it says they're willing to put their name on a product that's inferior." Instead, this technician would like to advise lab owners: "hire and train good technicians."

In a rather astute observation, one Young Technician we interviewed sees Dental Lab Outsourcing as "just one more aspect of the entire Globalization movement" that's going on world-wide. Dentists, he says, are outsourcing directly to foreign countries—and there's not much, if anything, that labs can do about it. There are overseas labs that will make a crown for \$30—not only does this beat the lab for which this young technician works, it even "beats down the guy working in a Brooklyn basement who's been doing them for \$50." For this Young Technician, "we're already not being respected and not being paid very well," and Outsourcing just takes us a step further down that same road.

### **From the perspective of a Young Technician, how do you envision the future of the Dental Lab Industry?**

• **The future is in the dentist's office**—One Young Technician sees the doctor's office as the focus of the dental lab in the future. With CDT and MDT courses under their belts, the lab technicians of the future will focus on bridging the gap between the dentist and the lab. In the future, this technician says, there will be fewer technicians, but their skills-sets will be such that, along with the technology that's entering if not taking over the industry, the industry will not need as many technicians to get its work done—in a phrase, he sums up the future this way, "technicians will be more skillful—we will not need as many technicians as we have, just technicians more-skilled than what we have."

• **The future is in technology**—Some of our Young Technicians felt strongly that the technician of the future would be under more pressure to stay abreast of developments in the industry, especially with technology "exploding"—otherwise, "they're going to be lost." "A Technician not skilled enough to deal with the new will become lost, explained one of our Focus Group participants.

• **The future looks bleak for the lab technician**—Two phenomena that are taking place simultaneously, outsourcing and CAD/CAM, "do not bode well for the future of the technician," says one of our interviewees. Pointing out that outsourcing is done to save money, and that CAD/CAM is done to save money, she reminds us that "the computer put a lot of people out of work in the graphic arts industry"—similarly, she muses, "It could make lower-cost help available to replace the artist technician." Says another interviewee, "the number of technicians employed in the future will be less," as technology advances further and further into the dental lab.

In line with that, another Young Technician points to the fact that, contrary to what's being said, there is no lack of help in this industry, and that lab owners are bringing in help "all the time." But they are not training the help—she says. They must "donate some time, give some lectures, donate some equipment—do something to train the technicians," which is what owners would do if they were investing in the technicians' future. But, owners are not doing so, she says—and, that being the case, she adds rhetorically, "How are we supposed to know what they want if they don't tell us?"

• **The future for the artist-technician looks secure**—Over the next ten years, one young technician expects that technology is not going to take over the fine art end of the dental lab industry. CAD/CAM, he observes, "has been around for a while—such as Procera." And yet, he notes, "the PFM is most of what we do." This

young technician predicts that in the future, "the better technicians will still have jobs—the industry will still need the artist technician." And on the other hand, he prophesies, "the technicians who don't know what they're doing, the ones who don't qualify to serve as the true artists of this field, will be phased out, gradually placed on the street."

Another agrees with this sentiment, saying "I don't see that much change in 10 years. It's part of the industry's evolution, all this technology. If educated, the technician has a better chance. The Technology will change the dental lab, and the technician has to change with it if they want to have a future here."

### **What would Young Technicians like to say to Lab Owners?**

• If you want consistent success, educate yourselves and your employees, and hire educated, skilled help.

• At one point in your career, you started out as a dental lab technician—treat your technicians now the way you wanted to be treated back then.

• Productivity is the key to success in any business—and if you have a young, educated technician, give them a chance to prove him or herself—you will get what you're looking for.

• Take the time to train a new technician like a blank slate—give them all the advice they can't get in the schools, and in the end, it will pay off for you.

• Organize and educate. Organize because dentists are wise to the low-balling that goes on, and they play you. They say, "So and so down the road doesn't charge me for this or that," so you end up not charging them, and you're getting squeezed out of your profits. Indirectly we're all squeezing each other. One of the main problems with our trade is that we're not organized. On Staten Island, there are 22 dental labs. An effort was made to call a meeting to organize those labs—only 4 showed up.

Educate because in the end it comes back to you, it pays off, not just in quality of work, but also in loyalty, in low turnover, in morale, in an organization you can be proud of.

• Worry less about quantity and more about quality—material and workmanship. Quality Over Quantity—I can do 25 cases a day for you, but will they be good?—Some will; some won't. Or, I can do 10 cases a day for you, and I guarantee they will fit, they will function, and they will be good.

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## **> Incoming President Establishes Direct Communications**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

result if the Dental Assistants are fashioned into an independent industry, requiring dentists to hire additional layers of support staff to fill-in areas where Assistants are not listed to cover, thereby raising the costs of dental care.

Having heard from the outside industries in the oral-dental team, NYSDA will now take the input they received on September 17th, to the upcoming deliberations on their plan for their '05 year, such as decisions about positions they should take on the sales tax issue.

Having forged this opening to the NYSDA, in-coming DLANY President Gary Spadaro intends to stay in close touch with the Council, to include a habit of regular communication on the 'hot' issues facing our industry.

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