

# PARTNERING FOR SUCCESSFUL *Orthodontic Education and Patient Care*

For the Georgia School of Orthodontics serving the greater Atlanta community, growth came fast as it opened its second facility just one year after opening its first.

Starting an orthodontics school from scratch can be a daunting task. At the Georgia School of Orthodontics – a brand-new out-of-the-box operation, as Program Director Dr. Ricky E. Harrell puts it – the goals were many when the school opened its first facility in 2016. Simply put, the school sought to attract student residents, attract a patient base for the residents to treat, and open facilities with state-of-the-art, cutting-edge services that would rival any private practice in a large urban area like Atlanta.

And yes, we said “facilities” – plural. Within a year of their city facility

opening, the school planned to open a second in Duluth, a suburb in neighboring Gwinnett County. It was an ambitious building schedule, but one that school officials felt was vital to serving the Atlanta area.

“Our plan was always to be out in the community and convenient to everyone,” said Marc Fraga, Managing Director. “We planned two facilities from the beginning, rather than having all the patients try to travel to one large central location in the city. In Atlanta, traffic is just unbelievable, and we wanted to serve as many patients as possible.”

The Gwinnett facility also allowed the school to serve a different demographic in the area and offer expanded programs. But perhaps most importantly, it served a need

that any new facility would covet – the school simply needed the space.

“Basically, we didn’t have enough chairs at just one facility to accommodate the 54 residents in the program,” Dr. Harrell said. “A new class was coming in and we needed the space.”

That made meeting an August 2017 deadline imperative. The school, however, had chosen a commercial site of just under 9,000 square feet for the new facility that presented some challenges in its floor plan.

“The building had a large commercial footprint and we are on the first floor,” Fraga explained. “Part of the floorplan has a sort of zig-zag shape to it that connects to a curved part of the building, and it

PHOTO ON THE RIGHT: Dr. Ricky E. Harrell, Program Director



presented a real challenge to try to get all the equipment and as many chairs as possible into the space. But we met with Patterson Dental and representatives of equipment manufacturers and vendors, and worked out the best possible solutions.”

“The process was basically our meeting with Patterson and telling them our ideas and what we wanted to see in the practice,” Fraga said. “They would come back and tell us what would work and what was realistic. I can say it had many iterations and a lot of back and forth until we came up with the optimal solutions for the space.”

Faced with a hard deadline, Patterson and partners worked hard to meet that opening date, at one point even flying in technicians for Biotec to work through the night to install cabinetry at the location just days before it was scheduled to open.

“The time crunch was important to us,” Fraga said. “This is a school and we had residents waiting to begin their training. It was very important that we open on time, and I thought what Patterson

did was very dedicated and very creative. We made our opening.”

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY

While design of the space was important – eventually finding room enough for 20 chairs – it was only the first step. The school is dedicated to equipping its students with the most advanced, up-to-date technology available.

“We do have to cover the basics, but it’s also important to give our residents training on the best equipment available,” Dr. Harrell said. “Some of them will go into practices that have been updated. Others will go into practices that were started by a Baby Boomer and still use older technology, taking analog images and other things. But for new residents, we have to be conscious that orthodontics is changing and the technology is changing. It would be silly to pretend it isn’t, and we have to make sure this program shows them what’s coming and what they can expect.”

Equipping the school also has an impact on drawing patients. “State-of-the-art technology was

a key for a basic reason. We were starting from scratch,” Fraga said. “It’s a new facility and you want the best technology available. It’s also important from the patient’s point of view. As a teaching school, we have a lower price point. It’s important that the patients feel comfortable and know that they will get the same high standard of service and the treatment they can get anywhere else. We want to present a high-end feel, both in the equipment and the overall design of the facility.”

Through meetings with Patterson, vendors, and equipment companies, the facility opened with a range of sleek technology, including 3Shape TRIOS and iTero Element intraoral scanners, Planmeca ProMax S3 pan/ceph, Viulex LED II Swing Mounted Lights, a Biotec custom sterilization center, and complete treatment software, to name just a few components.

While it’s all impressive, the intraoral scanners have proved to be the rock stars of the high-tech lineup. With complete digital designs that can be printed out in a hard model on a 3D printer (through a lab), the



need for traditional impressions has been replaced.

“The intraoral scanners are clearly the thing that has the biggest impact on patients,” Fraga said. “Nobody likes the old-fashioned impressions. Patients are always very happy to hear that they don’t have to go through that. And [the scanners] are very accurate, which enhances the learning experience for our students.”

Fraga said the school’s offering of Invisalign products also has been a major patient draw along with the complete line of orthodontic treatments.

Also of note, clinically, is the Dolphin orthodontics software that allows both facilities to share digital information, including patient histories.

“For the doctors and residents, it’s the digital patient filing system that I think is the most impressive,” Fraga said. “We have multiple residents travelling between two facilities. They all have to be able to look up a patient’s information at any time in either place. You just can’t do that with hard copy records.”

*“Our plan was always to be out in the community and convenient to everyone.”  
– Marc Fraga.*

### CREATING ATMOSPHERE

The planning for the Gwinnett facility, however, did not stop at simply fitting 20 chairs into a commercial space and equipping the office. The school has made a major commitment to the look and feel of both of its facilities.

Thought was given to the color scheme chosen for the new facility, for example, as well as installing Edison-style light features and modern art. That included working with a local artist to create the decorative design of the facility as well as the art on the walls. The school also worked with architects to ensure a modern, open design.

“We wanted to make it feel comfortable for the patients,” Dr. Harrell said. “There was planning for the color scheme and an emphasis on being able to see outside the building. Most of the

chairs here face a floor-to-ceiling window looking outside. It creates an openness. Many older practices have a very closed-in feeling.”

“At our other facility, we’ve made the same efforts,” Dr. Harrell explained. “We’ve done this so that walking into either location you get the same experience. And the patients remark on it. They feel comfortable and at ease, which is important.”

The sheer beauty of the facility also has made the Georgia School of Orthodontics somewhat of an envy for orthodontists in the area – not a bad thing to be when trying

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PHOTOS – LEFT TO RIGHT:

- Dr. Faraz Soltanian, Resident Class of 2019, and Dr. Ricky E. Harrell, GSO Program Director;
- Planmeca ProMax S3 pan/ceph dual sensor;
- iTero element intraoral scanner;
- Patient records in Dolphin Imaging





to attract orthodontics students.

“When we opened, the doctors and the residents were all very excited,” Fraga said. “In some ways this second facility is nicer than our first. We have chandeliers in this facility, a lot of natural light, the artwork, and some very high-end features. It’s just a very pleasant experience.”

Essentially, the facility equals about three private practices in size, and the challenge for any school of orthodontics is to attract the patients it needs to give students the necessary clinical experience.

“The patient’s first contact with us is usually on our

website, so when they come in and see the facility, the equipment, the art, they are usually very pleasantly surprised,” Fraga said. “We’re a teaching facility. For us it’s not about the bottom line, but about the number of patients we can bring in for our residents. In just two years, we’ve grown to about 2,000 patients. That’s always our first aim: to serve patients within our education format.”

### A GREAT START

Two years after opening its first facility, the Georgia School of Orthodontics offers an accredited Advanced Specialty Education Program in Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics through a 3-year residency program. Collectively, the school’s faculty has more than 100 years of practical orthodontia experience

and the school has grown into the largest orthodontic resident program in the United States. The school also operates a lecture series and training program with Emory University, bringing its residents in contact with the university's oral surgery students.

The Georgia School of Orthodontics also has made an impact in the Atlanta community by pledging more than \$100,000 in free orthodontics care. That includes the school's Gift of a Smile program, which currently provides free care to children, and its Purple Heart Smiles, providing \$50,000 in free care to the children of Purple Heart recipients.

And it's all done within two beautiful facilities, designed for the ultimate in patient comfort and equipped with the best technology available today through a partnership with Patterson Dental.

"This is a brand-new program and we want to show that we are state-of-the-art and cutting edge," Dr. Harrell said. "And the patients feel assured by that. They want to know they are getting the best current and up-to-date treatment and not feel like they've just walked into a practice still operating in the 1970s. We want to feel we are setting a new trend for orthodontics residency, and I think we are off to a great start."

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**PHOTOS – OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE:**

Inviting front desk area;

3Shape TRIOS intraoral scanner;

Group photo, left to right: Andrew Ligon, Sterilization Technician; Laykin Herford, Clinical Coordinator; Carmen Moreno, Clinical Coordinator; Emily Fant, Jr., Vice President of Operations; Inez D. Taggart, Treatment Coordinator; Daisy Negron, Front Desk Coordinator; and Brendrea Chambliss, Treatment Coordinator

Schick sensor for XRay2Go (handheld PA X-ray)

**PHOTOS, RIGHT, CLOCKWISE:**

Large 20-chair clinic;

Viulux LED II swing mounted light;

Clinic view from SDS chair package;

Modern waiting area

