

June 9, 2009

By DAVID SHAROS For The Sun

Naperville isn't just home for this dynamic duo -- it's the place they decided to build a family and a practice.

In 18 short months, Anthony LaVacca and his wife, Manal Ibrahim, who operate separate dental practices, already have made names for made names for themselves.

"We hand-picked the location where we opened our business 18 months ago, and this is the place where we want to raise our kids," Ibrahim said. "We feel like we've really connected with the city here and the people and the friendships we've made."

The husband and wife dentists, who are parents of two children ages 4 and 2, say that for them, Naperville was their choice above all others to raise a family and launch their businesses. LaVacca said when he moved from New York to Chicago, his last thought was to set up shop in the suburbs, but the needs of his children soon changed that.

"One day my two boys wanted to play soccer in the hallway where we were living, and it was then I said to myself, we have to get out of here and away from the city, and when we started looking at communities and schools, there was no other place to consider but Naperville," he said. "We know how great it is -- it's the city away from the city. We don't feel like we've made Naperville -- it's Naperville that has made us."

But Naperville is very glad to have them here, too. Last month, the husband and wife team were each recipients of the Naperville Area Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year Awards.

Ibrahim, 42, operates Innovative Orthodontic Centers, a practice she said has been growing month by month, thanks in part to their participation in many local events and networking with other local businesses that she said have been "cross promotional" in nature.

"We actually started with a customer base of zero, but the number of patients and referrals has increased, and we've experienced exponential growth," Ibrahim said. "Our approach to our practice here is 'dentistry from the heart,' and I think patients appreciate the way we treat them, from offering coffee while they wait to hanging up their coat when they come in. We try to appeal to all of their senses."

LaVacca's Naperville Dental Specialists offers a full range of traditional dental services and the latest in dental technology and software programs to provide patients with state-of-the-art care. Technology specialists even say they are amazed at the amount of goodies available at LaVacca's fingertips.

"We've heard specialists say they've never seen so much high-end software at any other place before," LaVacca, 41, said. "We do our share of general dentistry here, but I particularly enjoy the more challenging cases."

LaVacca's background features a dentist's tour-de-force of specialties, which include implants, laser surgery on gum tissue, and advanced training as a prosthodontist -- a specialty that involves work with facial implants and working with medical doctors helping restore portions of the face and head for those who have experienced trauma.

"When I lived in New York before moving here, I worked for about four months as a volunteer, helping identify victims from the attack on the World Trade Center using their dental records," LaVacca said. "It was one of the hardest but most rewarding things I've ever done."



Dr. Manal Ibrahim works with patient Victor Huerta on June 2 at her Naperville office. Terence Guider-Shaw / For The Sun



Dr. LaVacca