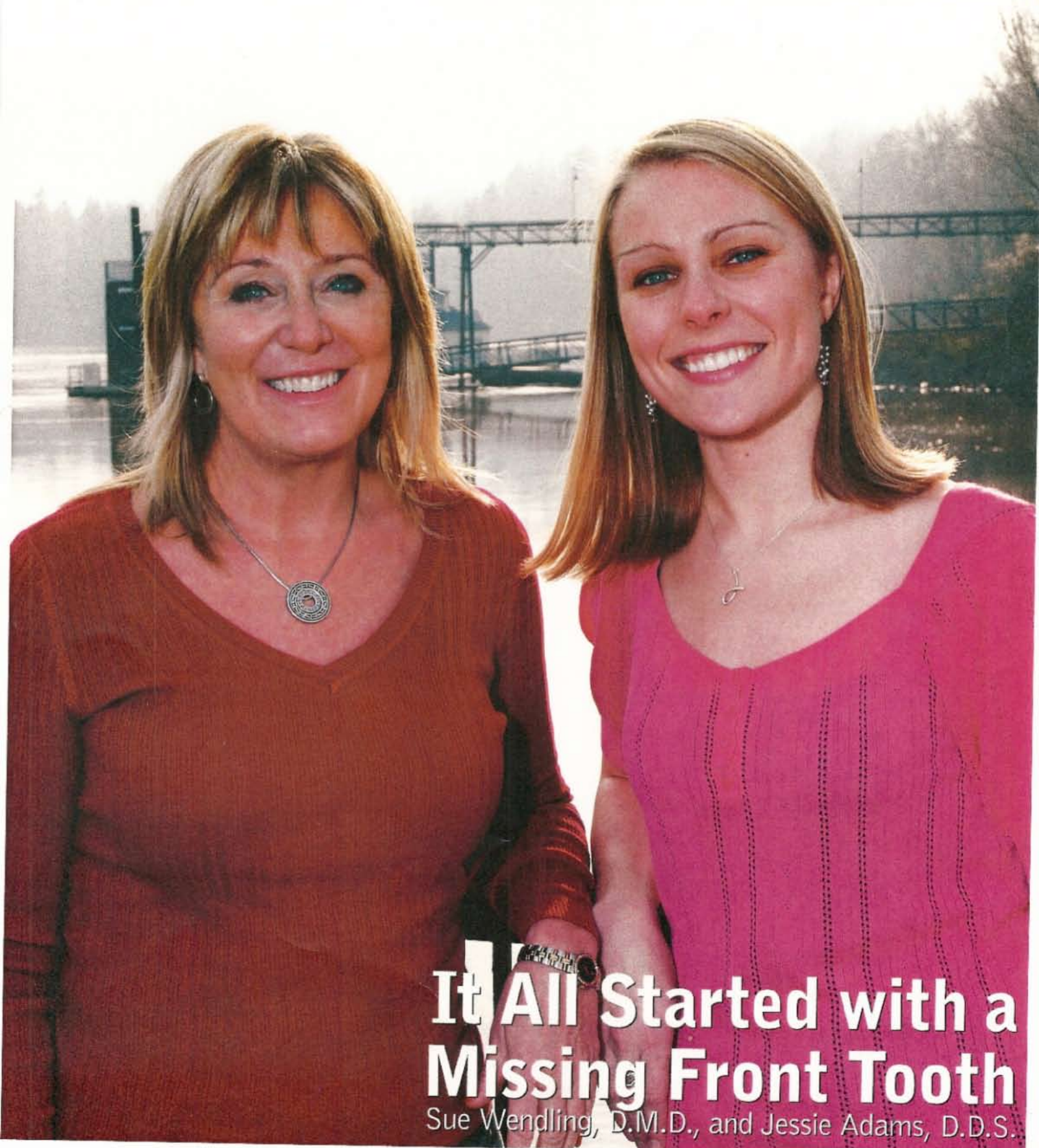


# DOCTOR *of* DENTISTRY

A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR DENTISTS



**It All Started with a  
Missing Front Tooth**

Sue Wendling, D.M.D., and Jessie Adams, D.D.S.



# It All Started with a Missing Front Tooth

Sue Wendling, D.M.D., and Jessie Adams, D.D.S.

By Chuck Green

What 12-year-old girl wouldn't figure that nothing could doom her universe more than a missing front tooth? For Dr. Jessie Adams, however, the gap in her teeth years ago blossomed into a career working alongside her dentist and mentor, Dr. Sue Wendling, who focuses on cosmetic dentistry and neuromuscular reconstruction in Lake Oswego, OR. Just as importantly to the two, their relationship has evolved into a deep bond and friendship. If that bears all the earmarks of a quintessential feel-good Hollywood plot, then the two

**W**e both have a strong work ethic and a strong drive to make whatever we do the best it can be. We have the same drive and passion for our work.

— Jessie Adams, D.D.S.

dentists believe they have the dream roles of their lives.

It all started innocently enough, with a little good old-fashioned word of mouth.

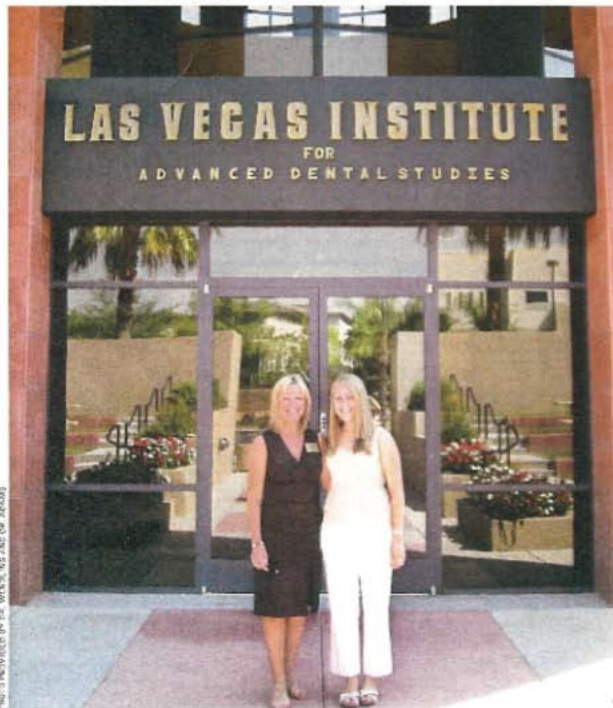
"The word on the street was that Dr. Sue Wendling was a great cosmetic dentist, so my parents took me to see her," said Adams, now 29. With a lilt in her voice, she recalls the impression Wendling made on her during that first visit. "Sue was such a cool dentist and so enthusiastic. She said things to me like, 'You know, you can go to dental school,'" noted Adams, who fondly recalls her depth of curiosity as she watched through a hand-held mirror as Wendling treated her mouth. "I was just fascinated by what she was doing." Ironically, it turned out that Adams was also casting an eye into her future.

While on hiatus from college several years later, Adams visited Wendling at the office for a teeth cleaning. "Sue asked me why I was home and where I was going to work. I told her I wasn't going to work and she said, 'You're wrong; you're going to work here.' She had an opening and needed someone to start the next day. She told me she thought I'd be perfect for it," said Adams, who took

**I**t's never too early to start the search for an associate. You, your team and your patients will all benefit.

— Sue Wendling, D.M.D.

Dr. Sue Wendling and Dr. Jessie Adams stand outside LVI in Las Vegas, NV, where Dr. Adams took her first LVI course before she started practicing dentistry.



the job as an assistant. "I knew nothing about dentistry," Adams chuckled, "only what I had observed when I was there."

Once she started, however, the experience was revealing beyond her wildest expectations. "I thought it was the greatest thing and I was learning so much. I think she saw something in me from an early age. She wasn't pushy, but I think she had faith in my ability to become a dentist, and the kind of person and dentist she'd want to work with. It takes a special person to see that in someone. I'm thankful she opened opportunities for me. I was like, 'Why me?'"

## WENLING LIKED JESSIE IMMEDIATELY

To Wenling, who not only saw a young girl eager to have her smile restored, while paying rapt attention to how it was done, the answer was easy. "I liked Jessie when she was just a young girl coming into the office. She seemed bright and friendly and came from a good family. When I found out she was taking a little break from college, I just had this feeling about her so I asked her if she'd like to come in and help around the office."

Almost immediately after Adams began, the two realized their



Pictured standing from left: Vicky, Stacey, Adrienne, Nikki and Liz. In front: Dr. Jessie Adams and Dr. Sue Wendling.

association seemed almost pre-ordained. "As soon as she started at the office, I saw how intelligent she was and what a great work ethic she had," noted Wendling. "With dentistry, most people think, 'Why would anyone want to be a dentist?' But she knew early on that it was what she wanted to do, and never wavered," Wendling said of Adams, who initially worked at her office for about nine months, by which time she had decided to become a dentist. After that, she continued to work with Wendling during school breaks.

"Part of it was just being an assistant and watching what she was doing," noted Adams, who had been on track to attend veterinary school and graduated with a degree in biology from George Fox University, not far from Wendling's office. "Sue's not just a normal dentist; she does the kind of work that changes not only people's appearance but how they feel about themselves. I thought that was very inspiring." She went on to say, "I loved working with animals, and I know people are passionate about their animals, but I felt cosmetic dentistry was life-changing."

"I started out wanting to be a vet, too," laughed Wendling. "I never knew she wanted to be a vet."

## Neuromuscular Dentistry

An area of special interest to Dr. Sue Wendling is neuromuscular dentistry, a technique for balancing occlusion. Neuromuscular dentistry is performed with the use of a TENS unit, a computerized jaw tracking system, called the K-7, and tomograms, which determine the optimal mandibular position.

### Who is a candidate?

Some oral signs and symptoms:

- Worn teeth
- Recession and abfractions
- Inexplicable multiple root canals
- Fractured teeth
- Narrow maxillary arches

### Related Health Issues:

- Headaches
- Neck pain
- Tinnitus
- Stuffy ears
- Clicking or popping temporomandibular joints
- Snoring
- Clenching or bruxing
- Sleep apnea
- Insomnia
- General body misalignment

### What is Neuromuscular Dentistry?

A technique for balancing the occlusion, where the focus is on joint position and keeping the head and neck muscles as relaxed as possible, both at rest and when in function.

### How are these goals accomplished?

Through the use of a TENS unit, a computerized jaw tracking system and tomograms we determine the optimal mandibular position. The treatment can be as simple as a nighttime orthotic or may involve a coronoplasty, orthodontics, reconstruction of one or both arches.



Dr. Jessie Adams with Sydney, one of her young patients

The first four weeks after working with Wendling, Adams said she knew she wanted to be a dentist. "I loved working with animals, and I know people are passionate about their animals, but I felt like cosmetic dentistry was life-changing."

## PERFECTIONISTS

But one thing they know is that they're both perfectionists — a double-edged sword in dentistry, noted Wendling. "I kind of feel sorry that Jessie's like that because (as a dentist) you're working in a wet, small, black hole on a moving target and you can't always be perfect. But we both have this philosophy that in performance it's either an 'A' or an 'F'. There is no room for 'C' work. You can drive yourself crazy, but it's probably one reason we'll be able to work so well together."

Adams agrees the high standard they set for themselves isn't exactly a blessing. "Unfortunately, we view things as perfection or failure. We both have a strong work ethic and a strong drive to make whatever we do the best it can be. We have the same drive and passion for our work."

At one point many years ago when her focus was general dentistry, Wendling felt far from passionate about her work and seriously considered leaving the field. "I was so bored. I'd go to work every day and plug those silver fillings. No one gets up out of the chair and says, 'Thank you so much for putting that ugly black filling in my tooth.'"

Then, about five years out of dental school, Wendling attended the Las Vegas Institute of Advanced Dental Studies (LVI) and shifted her

focus to cosmetic dentistry. It opened an entirely new vista for her. "Now I love dentistry so much that when I see a set of veneers, I get all choked up. I think about how incredible my patients look and how it may very possibly change their lives," said Wendling, who was the first female clinical instructor at LVI, a post she still holds. "I've been in the same profession for 30 years, first as a hygienist and now as a dentist. How many people can say that they love their work after 30 years? Not many. Now, instead of feeling underappreciated and under-utilized, I get hugs and thank you cards, and even gifts! What's not to like?"

## CURBS STAID APPROACH

Difficult as it might be for most of those patients to fathom, when Wendling first became a dentist, she felt duty-bound to take a more staid approach to her practice and the manner in which she interacted with her clientele. Consequently, she forced herself into an ill-fitting role that did not at all reflect her offbeat personality.

## Associates Looking for the Right Practice

Taking your time looking for the right practice makes all the difference in the world. It is so important to find one that shares your philosophy and that you are compatible with the senior doctor.

1. Work for the practice first.
2. Get to know the other associates and practice staff.
3. Use an outside source to draw up your contract — we chose Joe Consani of Consani and Associates.

## Finding the Right Associate

It's never too early to start the search. You, your team and your patients will all benefit.

1. Mentor someone, starting at the high school level if possible.
  - a. Invite him/her to observe in the office.
  - b. Offer him/her a summer job.
  - c. Take him/her to continuing education programs.
2. If mentoring isn't realistic, ask your contacts at your alma mater and your equipment and supply reps that work with dental schools for names of standout students.
3. Realize that your way may not be the only way, but be very clear on procedural "must dos" in the office.
4. No matter how well you know the potential associate, make your contract very thorough. Don't just talk money. Address things like continuing education and even time spent outside the office promoting the practice in the contract.
5. Don't be greedy. Your initial costs for new equipment, promotional pieces and relinquishing some patients will take a bite out of your net. You have to visualize the pay-off down the road.



Tammy Ferguson had scarlet fever when she was a little girl, and had a lot of dental work as a young adult, a number of silver fillings and several crowns.

"In 1999 I started removing the metal from my mouth, one tooth at a time," Tammy explains. She went to several dentists, wasn't happy with the results, and ended up with several porcelain crowns, each a different color. Then her teeth started. She had another broken tooth, and was referred to Dr. Sue Wendling because she was a great cosmetic dentist.

During the consultation and testing that followed, Tammy found that she had an overbite and that her jaw was out of alignment. She was also clenching and grinding her teeth at night, and that was the cause of her tension headache every morning. She thought they were part of her life that went along with having a stressful job and a 5-year-old.

The first step was to take care of the bite by wearing a night guard, and then take care of the rest of her teeth. Soon Tammy was having fewer headaches. She kept wearing the night guard, who was now her friend, opening her bite and relaxing her jaw. She stopped clenching and grinding her teeth.

Once that was done, they talked about replacing the metal in her mouth. Dr. Wendling recommended a full-mouth reconstruction. "The best part," said Tammy, "is that you go in and it's done in one appointment. I went in for a six-hour appointment and she did all the bottom temporaries. I wore those for awhile to adjust to them, and then she did the temporaries on the top." Then they fine-tuned the temporaries until they had the perfect bite.

"It all happened so fast. I started in August 2005 and the permanent teeth were in by February 2006," said Tammy. "The temporaries were just as beautiful as the crowns and veneers I have now, which was a huge relief." All the metal is gone!



Tammy Ferguson, patient

PHOTO BY GAILLE FERGUSON FOR THE DENTIST



"Dr. Wendling took care of a medical problem I didn't realize I had, as well as fixing my teeth," explains Tammy. "I love the result, the look and the way they feel. When people see me they don't know what it is, but they tell me I look great and a lot younger. I don't have headaches; I don't clench and grind my teeth. I still have a stressful job and I still have a 5-year-old, but I feel great, and it was a very positive experience."

Fortunately, her philosophy underwent a dramatic turnaround in the mid-'90s when Wendling worked with management guru Bill Blachford. "He urged us to make our practices fit our own personal style. That's exactly what I needed to hear."

After the program, Wendling thought to herself, "You don't need more than 800 people to have a full-time dental practice, and there's got to be 800 people in this community that would like me the way I am." So I decided I was just going to go in there and be myself. "The minute I relaxed, my practice growth went through the roof."

And Adams has fit right in. "I listen to Jessie when she's with patients and it's so great because she's so natural with them. And I'm

getting such good feedback from patients because they love her."

In fact, Adams is well on her way to establishing her own patient following, much to Wendling's delight. "I'm proud of her because I know it hasn't always been easy and it's not always going to be easy, but she was just a superstar in dental school, which I knew she would be, and now she's great to work with. The office team adores her and my patients love her. She's bringing in her own new patients, which has been a pleasant surprise. I thought I'd have to provide her with all her own patients."

Adams said it's mostly a matter of abiding by her mentor's advice. "I sat down with Sue for several weeks before I actually started work-



ing and picked her brain and learned how she did things. I have all these notebooks full, in some cases almost word for word, of what she said. My goal is to create continuity in the practice. I've tried to model the way I handle patients the best I can through what Sue has taught me."

And, as Adams saw while attending Loma Linda University School of Dentistry near Los Angeles, from which she graduated in 2006, they were valuable lessons. "I had such an advantage over my classmates as far as dental knowledge, what it takes to run a practice and how to interact with patients. Working with Sue was the best preparation. I think several of my dental school classmates had had their teeth cleaned and it was the only exposure they'd had to dentistry."

## PAYING IT FORWARD

As grateful as Adams feels to have a mentor in Wendling, Sue says she's simply "paying it forward." Wendling's OHSU dental school mentors were Dr. John Peterson, Director of Clinical Affairs, who never forgot a birthday and even loaned her money during a dry spell before student loan dispersal. Dr. Peterson is now deceased, but Wendling still thinks of him frequently. Dr. Art Brown, Dean of Academic Affairs, offered support in the way of tutoring for a single mom who had been out of hygiene school 14 years and by introducing Wendling to two senior dental students who were also single moms. Joe Consani from OHSU and now founder of Consani and Associates continues to offer support and even provided the paperwork and guidance with Dr. Adams' associate agreement.

"Post dental school, the person who made the single biggest difference in my career and even influenced how I live my life is Dr. Bill Dickerson. Hearing him lecture in the mid-'90s is why I am a dentist today," says Wendling. And now as a relative neuromuscular "newbie" she not only relies on Dr. Dickerson and LVI for information, but knows that two of neuromuscular dentistry's gurus, Dr. Robert Jankelson and Dr. Clayton Chan, are only a phone call away. And, here locally we are lucky to have neuromus-

cular dentist Dr. Arthur Parker and his many years of experience in this arena.

Wendling's mentorship of Adams was only the beginning. During her tenure at Loma Linda, her mentor and biggest supporter was Dr. Andy Blount. He had so much confidence in Adams' ability that he and his entire family became her patients!

Now beyond dental school, Adams will have the opportunity to be inspired by more leading-edge dentists such as Dr. Ron Jackson. As her dental school graduation gift, and before working her first day as a dentist, Wendling took Adams to LVI's Posterior Aesthetic Restorative course. It was a hands-on live patient treatment course. Turns out, Adams was the most recent graduate to ever take an LVI live patient course. She looks forward to continuing her LVI education.

## GREATER EMPHASIS ON NEUROMUSCULAR DENTISTRY

Wendling looks forward to devoting more time to a full-mouth reconstruction process using neuromuscular techniques, which focuses on treating people with severely worn teeth, pain or a combination of the two. In neuromuscular dentistry, a computerized system called the K-7, developed by Myotronics in Seattle, WA, is used to pinpoint the location of an individual's most comfortable bite, which is then placed in that position through various methods. The process helps alleviate painful conditions such as headaches, neck pain, TMJ pain, dizziness, stuffy ears, bruxism, clenching, snoring, sleep apnea, etc., while giving patients the appearance of a nonsurgical facelift.

Adams is enthusiastic about building the children's side of the practice and working more with Invisalign or invisible braces, along with performing mercury-free dentistry and helping to keep up with the increasing demand for cosmetic dentistry. "That way, we'll both have our own niche," says Wendling.

But make no mistake, to Jessie Adams, a missing front tooth was a small price to pay for the dental appointment of a lifetime. ■



Dr. Jessie Adams' LVI case — before



After

Summer Concert 2006. Dr. Sue Wendling with Dr. Art Parker, Dr. Bob Jankelson and Loretta Pippins. Each summer the practice has a concert in the park next to the office that is open to the public.

