

Solid Bite, a father-and-son led dental practice in Melbourne, thrives; team members empowered as Sheldon family creates inviting work environment

By Ken Datzman

Dr. Lee Sheldon, originally from Massachusetts, is one of the region's best-known periodontists.

He's built a successful business providing care to a growing roster of patients and fostering an inviting work environment for his 20-member team, in a practice atmosphere centered on trust, responsibility, and autonomy.

The family business includes his son, general practitioner Dr. Matthew Sheldon, who partnered with his father in June 2012 at Solid Bite on Sarno Road. Both are graduates of Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, renowned for its clinical training.

Solid Bite is a reconstructive periodontal and dental practice.

"I knew I wanted to come back to Brevard County to practice," said Dr. Matthew Sheldon, who earned his undergraduate degree in health science from the University of Florida.

"This is where I grew up and where my family lives. After some discussions with my father, we decided to team up. It's been a great experience."

"You don't see a periodontist and a general dentist working together in the same practice," said his father. "So when Matthew stepped in, it created a unique practice."

The Sheldons say they pride themselves on the type of office environment they've created.

"Team members at the practice are empowered," said Dr. Matthew Sheldon. "It's an atmosphere we've developed. Team members 'own' their position at the practice. If they find a way to make things better, they bring it to our attention and we discuss their idea. Every Tuesday morning at 6:30 we meet as a team. We talk about all the positive things that have happened over the past week, as well as any issues that may come up. It's a great way to share a lot of good energy. I believe my father created a great work environment from the day he started the practice."

The Solid Bite team includes Eleanor Sheldon, Dr. Lee Sheldon's wife. She oversees the financial operations of the practice and has been involved in the business for as long as her husband has.

Their oldest son, Daniel, is an award-winning television sports anchor out West, and their daughter, Stephanie, works as a transcriptionist in Oviedo. They both have contributed to the success of the practice, too.

"Our daughter Stephanie dictates letters and charts, types them up, and they come through our printer at the office," said Dr. Lee Sheldon. "And Daniel does some of our voice-overs for our productions. We have the entire family involved in the practice in some way."

The third member of the Solid Bite practitioner team is Dr. Michel Furtado. Together, the three doctors at Solid Bite have authored the book "The Ultimate Mouth Manual," which contains "information patients need to make dental decisions in the 21st century." The book is sold at Amazon.com.

Dr. Matthew Sheldon was just named one of the top 40 dentists in the nation under age 40 by "Incisal Edge," a nationwide magazine covering the dental profession. The magazine's annual "40 Under 40" award honors what it calls "America's rising stars" in dentistry. He has served as president of the 170-member Brevard County Dental Society.



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Periodontist Dr. Lee Sheldon, right, has provided comprehensive implant, periodontic, and full-mouth restoration dental services to area residents for decades. His son, Dr. Matthew Sheldon, a general dentist, teamed with his father at Solid Bite in 2012, creating a unique practice. "You don't see a periodontist and a general dentist working together in the same practice," said Dr. Lee Sheldon. Both are graduates of Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, renowned for its clinical training.

Joseph McGrath of Benco Dental nominated Dr. Matthew Sheldon, who received supporting documentation for the award from Solid Bite office manager Danyel Salmela and lead restorative dental assistant Katie Dennison.

Teamwork, said Dr. Matthew Sheldon, is one of the things that has made his practice successful. His longtime mentor in the field has been his father.

Dr. Lee Sheldon opened his Melbourne practice Oct. 16, 1980, treating patients with gum disease. "That was before the era of dental implants," he said, adding that his practice grew and grew through referral from general dentists in the area.

"We have a very good group of general dentists

practicing in Brevard County."

Solid Bite has a full portfolio of high-tech dental equipment, including a dental microscope.

A dental microscope is an important tool that allows for better visualization through magnification of objects, especially for the detection of gum disease, said Dr. Matthew Sheldon.

Bacterial infections "trigger destructive immunological reactions," which result in loss of gum attachment and bone around the teeth.

"With periodontal disease, like many chronic illnesses, you generally don't feel any symptoms. Using the dental

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microscope, we're able to see what's actually going on in the patient's mouth. We are able to identify the bacteria in the patient's mouth and assess the risk level for periodontal disease," said Dr. Matthew Sheldon.

A recent study has periodontists — experts in the treatment, diagnosis, and prevention of periodontal disease — encouraging patients to maintain gum health in an effort to reduce their Alzheimer's disease risk.

The study, published in the journal "Science Advances," uncovered a possible link between *P. gingivalis* — the bacteria associated with periodontal disease, commonly known as gum disease — and Alzheimer's.

Researchers analyzed brain tissue, spinal fluid, and saliva from Alzheimer's patients — both living and deceased — and found evidence of *P. gingivalis*.

Gingipains, the toxic enzyme created by *P. gingivalis*, were found in 96 percent of the 53 brain tissue samples examined, with higher levels detected in those with the pathology and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

Although the study results add to the evidence supporting a link between gum disease and Alzheimer's, the authors say additional research is needed to better understand the etiology of Alzheimer's and how periodontal disease bacteria can "exacerbate progression."

In another new study, U.S. researchers found that a history of periodontal disease appeared to be associated with a raised risk of esophageal (gullet) cancer and gastric (stomach) cancer and this risk was higher among people who had lost teeth previously.

Previous findings on the relationship of periodontal disease and tooth loss with esophageal cancer and gastric cancer have been inconsistent.

Therefore, a team of researchers from Harvard's School

of Public Health in Boston carried out a study of data on patients over decades of follow-up.

They examined the association of history of periodontal disease and tooth loss with the risk of esophageal cancer and gastric cancer in 98,459 women from the Nurses' Health Study (1992–2014) and 49,685 men from the Health Professional Follow-up Study (1988–2016).

Dental measures, demographics, lifestyle, and diet were assessed using follow-up questionnaires and self-reported cancer diagnosis was confirmed after reviewing medical records.

The results showed that during 22–28 years of follow-up, there were 199 cases of esophageal cancer and 228 cases of gastric cancer. A history of periodontal disease was associated with a 43 percent and 52 percent increase risk of esophageal cancer and gastric cancer, respectively.

This study was published in "Gut," a leading international journal in gastroenterology and hepatology.

Dr. Lee Sheldon said there is a new diagnostic tool available to test a patient's saliva and plaque to determine the specific types of bacteria present in their mouth. Solid Bite now offers Oral Bacterial DNA testing.

"Periodontal disease is related to heart disease, kidney disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease," said Dr. Lee Sheldon. "With Oral Bacterial DNA testing we are able to very simply send a patient sample to a laboratory and be able to identify the bacteria that is present in the patient. This type of testing gives us a much better way of monitoring periodontal disease."

He added, "It's nice to use the dental microscope as the initial screening device, and then with the DNA testing be able to actually identify what the bacteria is — that makes a big difference."

Dentists say the mouth is a window into the health of the body. It can show signs of nutritional deficiencies or general infection.

People with diabetes, for instance, often have periodontal disease. In addition, there is evidence that people with diabetes are more likely to develop and have more severe periodontitis than those without diabetes.

To maintain optimal oral health, the American Dental Association recommends regular dental visits, at intervals determined by a dentist.

Dental practices in the region are back in full swing, after the state ordered dentists to treat only emergency cases as part of its efforts to keep residents at home during the coronavirus pandemic.

When patients visit the Solid Bite office for care, they will see an aerosol filtration system, a new breakthrough in chairside protection for the patient.

Now, more than ever, clean air is of great importance in health-care offices, especially dental practices. The filtration system removes droplets and aerosols produced during treatment.

"How can we give the patient the confidence that our facility is as clean as possible? We have the cleanest air coming from our air-conditioning units. We have UV light filtration. And we have invested in an air filtration system," said Dr. Matthew Sheldon.

He continued, "Anytime I put a drill in a patient's mouth it creates aerosols. The movable vacuum system sits right in front of the patient, actually within a couple of inches. Anything that is going into the environment is getting sucked up by the filtration system. We keep it on 24 hours. Patients can feel confident coming to our practice."



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