

Carolina Comfort



Story by Kevin Henry, Managing Editor
Photos by IndigoBleue Photography

With a healthy dose of Southern hospitality, Dr. Angela Ruff has built a thriving practice in Fayetteville, N.C.

Surrounded by the green and brown camouflage of working in a town dominated by the United States military, Dr. Angela Ruff's practice, built on pampering and comfort, stands out **LIKE A ROSE IN THE DESERT**.

Practicing in Fayetteville, N.C., Dr. Ruff is accustomed to serving many of the families whose lives are intertwined with Fort Bragg, a U.S. Army base located northwest of the city. With the constant changes in base personnel, Dr. Ruff views her military neighbors as a huge opportunity for new business.

"I really love practicing in Fayetteville! It is a military town, and we are blessed with a constant flow of new patients and potential staff members by this ever-changing community population," Dr. Ruff explained. "Fayetteville also has a strong core of community-based population that has lived here for several generations, and I am certainly blessed to have been friends with many of them for decades."

After completing a general practice residency and working as an associate for another practice, Dr. Ruff opened her own practice in 1994. It started as a four-operator, 2,300-square-foot facility, and eventually expanded to seven operatories and 3,600 square feet to accommodate an associate. Her location is in the growing north part of town in a professional office complex across from one of Fayetteville's local colleges, Methodist College.

In her 13 years in dentistry, Dr. Ruff has relied on internal marketing and word of mouth to boost her practice. With amenities for patients and a staff focused on providing a high level of customer service, Dr. Ruff has seen her practice

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Front row (from left): Chaunessa Williams (assistant), Jessica Ramos (insurance coordinator), Pam Leszcz (hygiene coordinator), Tinyca McDonald (assistant), Dr. Angela Ruff. Second row (from left): Debbie Cooper (hygienist), Debbie Helms (financial coordinator), Sara Helms (assistant), Amy Cameron (hygienist).

thrive.

“Our practice philosophy is to provide excellent service and care in a relaxing spa-like atmosphere,” Dr. Ruff explained. “I have a great team of ladies I work with who share this vision, and these ladies have been key in helping our practice realize this goal. I also think the attitude of focusing on ‘solutions’ to problems rather than accusations has really helped us develop and deliver great customer care.”

“There are many complimentary amenities we have incorporated into our practice which have helped to perpetuate this goal — paraffin wax hand treatment, tempurpedic chair pads, IPODs, chenille blankets, warm towels, aromatherapy, and, most recently, a massage therapist. I must say that the recent addition of the massage therapist has been most favorably received by my staff and patients.”

Yes, the massage therapist works on Dr. Ruff’s staff as well. Dr. Ruff believes strongly that a refreshed staff is an energetic and happy staff.

“We worked out an arrangement with a spa to have a massage therapist in the office. The massage therapist and/or spa can also get referrals from the work she does on our patients. This type of business relationship is something that any dental office can do because there are so many spas and massage therapists,” Dr. Ruff said. “The massage is a relaxation aid for our patients and our staff. Patients who go through a long procedure can have a break with a massage. The same thing goes for the staff. It’s a break in the day for them and gets them reenergized and relaxed.”

Dr. Ruff realizes that spa amenities aren’t for every practice, but she also believes that money shouldn’t keep other dentists from offering them to their patients.

“Many of these amenities have been ‘almost free,’” Dr. Ruff explained. “We found a great Web site that offers original art for very little cost (www.wendoverart.com); it’s an inexpensive way to help the office have a beautiful atmosphere. The

The massage therapist helps both patients and staff members (here, financial coordinator Debbie Helms) relax.





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hot towels we offer patients after treatment are warmed in my old college-acquired Crock-Pot®. We use a company for our aromatherapy that sells us custom aromas by the bulk for a very reasonable price (www.arylessence.com). If I keep in mind the ergonomic benefit of weekly neck/shoulder massages for my staff and self, as well as the patient referrals from this unexpected service, the massage therapist could be possibly ‘almost free’ as well.”

While these amenities are wonderful, none of them are mentioned next to her name in the local phone book. The only amenity written there is “sedation dentistry,” and Dr. Ruff has found it to be a great boon for her practice.

“We offer sedation for a large percentage of our phobic patients, and these added holistic amenities have been a great synergistic aid in relaxing these nervous patients. I tease my massage therapist that she is better than a halcion,” Dr. Ruff laughed. “Sedation dentistry allows us to help patients who normally wouldn’t come into the dental office. We focus on being positive and giving great care, and sedation dentistry certainly falls into that focus.”

But there is more to Ascot Aesthetic Implants & Dentistry than just amenities. Dr. Ruff travels across the nation for continuing-education courses (accumulating around 150 hours of CE each year) and thrives on bringing new information back to her practice.

“Currently our staff size is transitioning from a larger two-doctor, 11-auxiliary team to a smaller one-doctor, seven-member team. Last year, my associate and I completed the 300-hour Implant Maxi course in New York City. Ironically, it was a stimulus for both of us to focus our professional attention in different directions. She is in the process of opening an ‘emergency dental clinic,’ and we have continued to focus our attention on complex rehabilitative cosmetic care. I think both philosophies can be a positive benefit to Fayetteville.”

Dr. Ruff’s most recent challenge came when her associate left the practice less than a year ago to start the clinic. However, the challenge quickly turned into an opportunity for Dr. Ruff to expand her practice.

“When my associate left, I really struggled to try and figure out what to do with all of this ‘extra space.’ However, we found that we actually use all of our seven equipped treatment rooms, just like any woman would use all of her closet space,” Dr. Ruff chuckled. “My father is a very gifted and busy periodontist, and certainly if he ever decided to sell his practice, there is plenty of room for him here.”

With an expanded office and a unique style of dentistry, Dr. Ruff has plenty of reasons to be excited about her practice. However, she’s quick to point out there are plenty of reasons for all dentists to be excited about their profession.

“This is such an exciting time to be in dentistry because there is such a wealth of technology available for helping our patients,” she explained. “Stem cell bone grafting, ICAT for 3-D planning, and the use of recombinant growth hormone to aid in generating bone development are but a few of the latest additions with improving our dentistry.”

“In my practice, the use of digital photography has been a huge aid in helping us communicate with our lab, as well as show patients many of our before-and-after cases. We have recently incorporated the software of ClearMatch to help us give our lab the value of color. It’s almost as great as having the lab tech in the operatory with you helping to select the shade. We recently revitalized our Web site with TNT (www.TNTdental.com) and have been thrilled with the results.”

Is Dr. Ruff happy? Yes. Is she satisfied? No.

“I do not think my practice will ever be exactly what I want it to be, simply because I’ve found that the more that I learn, the more that is out there that I need to know,” she said.

And with that attitude, it’s a safe bet that the people in and around Fayetteville, N.C., will be pampered and well served for years to come. **DE**



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