

Dr. Tina Merhoff

Filling a **PASSION** for **PREVENTION**,
HEALING and
INSPIRATION

By Karen Jarvis



IMAGE COURTESY OF IRRESISTIBLE PORTRAITS BY KAREN GOFORTH

Within seconds you know this place is different.

Giddy laughter accompanies every little patient that scurries through the child-sized door into Dr. Tina Merhoff & Associates Pediatric Dentistry in Winston-Salem. The delightful door chime, accompanied by endless smiles, is the start of an extraordinary experience for parents who rely on Merhoff and her staff to treat the littlest of patients.

“From the moment they walk through that door we want to touch their lives and influence them in some way,” said Dr. Tina, as she is affectionately called by patients, parents and staff. “We believe that it is a privilege to treat children, and that we have a unique opportunity to make a difference in their lives.”

Merhoff and her staff have cultivated a vibrant, engaging office. One where children eagerly play video games in the

lobby and excitedly bounce back to their dental chairs without an ounce of concern. One where mom and dad feel secure enough to wait in the lobby, enjoy a cup of freshly brewed coffee, a snack, and a magazine.

“I believe it keeps coming back around. What you give, you get back,” said Merhoff. “It’s a simple little principle but it’s really the truth.”

That truth is what she and her staff of 17 rely on every day. “It’s our job to show these children they can trust us,” said Dr. Amy Davidian, DDS. “It starts with their first visit and taking the time to explain to them everything we’re doing. We call this TSD, or “Tell, Show, Do.” First, we tell them what we’re going to do using terms that are child-friendly and easy for them to understand. Next, using a puppet, we show them what will be done. It’s after both of those steps that we

actually complete the treatment. Having a child leave us smiling is such a rewarding experience.”

“These kids deserve to see a big smile from us each time they’re here,” said Dr. Tina, who is also known to sing for her patients. “It’s our desire to inspire each and every child that they can do anything in life.”

Believing in Yourself

Merhoff is living proof that you can achieve your dreams. Growing up in rural Tennessee, she and her family had humble beginnings, which early on taught her the benefits of hard work and believing in oneself, as well as relying on God.

“My faith is what I credit for everything,” said Merhoff. “God has blessed me more than I ever deserve. He put me on this earth for a reason and I feel the need to give back.”

“She’s very inspirational,” said Judy Goldbach, office manager. “I have never worked for anybody that is so motivating and treats everyone like family.”

It was a family member that motivated and gave Merhoff the confidence to start her own dental practice. Her father-in-law, Frank Merhoff, served as an insightful mentor and one who challenged his daughter-in-law in ways that helped shape the type of business woman she is today. “He helped write my business plan and really tweaked it for me,” she said “He just had an excellent business mind.”

He also trained her to “believe in yourself,” a hard lesson she learned after a local bank agreed to give her a business loan, but only if her father-in-law would co-sign. “I was ecstatic. I called him and he hung up on me,” she said. “I called him back and said I think my cell phone dropped you. He said, ‘No, I want you to call me back when you really believe in yourself. I don’t think you’re ready to own your own business because you don’t believe in yourself or you wouldn’t be asking me to sign for you.’” Merhoff was devastated and thought all her dreams



were going to fall through. “All he had to do was co-sign. But I knew he wanted me to work harder on my business plan and I did.”

The second bank offer was better, according to Merhoff. “They said if he would sign for 6 months, you prove to us you can make the payments, you’re not late on them, we’ll remove his name. I thought he’s surely going to do this and I couldn’t wait to call him. He hung up on me again. I knew this time it didn’t get disconnected. I had disappointed him again. He held me to a very high standard and that’s how he trained me through the whole business plan process.”

The next round, after more work on her business plan, Dr. Tina got her loan, without her father-in-law’s signature. “A lot of people would have given up and walked away. He did not want me to do that. He believed in me more than I believed in myself.”

Balancing Act of Wife, Mother and Family

Another believer is her husband, Vance, a Salisbury based urologist. Having one doctor in a household is challenging enough, but with two, the demands are doubled. “I am very type A. I struggle with that,” said Dr. Tina. “I want to be the perfect mother, the perfect pediatric dentist, the perfect wife. I want to be the best Christian I can be and a Christian role model but it’s hard to be good at all of that.”

“Family ultimately is most important to me and the balancing act is quite difficult, but can be successful,” said Merhoff. “I want to credit my husband for his daily support.”

Support also comes from the couple’s young daughters, Maddie Bea, 6, and Abbie, 4. Each day after school the children actively take part in the office duties by holding hands of patients who might feel a bit apprehensive, as well as handing out stickers for a job well done. “They love it,” said Merhoff. “They play a pretty big role and parents seem to like the idea of a child here to comfort their children.”

“It is possible to be a mother, wife and have a career,” she said. “I know they can do anything in life if they believe in themselves.”

From Inspiration to Influence

Dr. Tina Merhoff & Associates has come a long way since that first fully-booked opening day on April 15, 2002. “We live the mission – putting children first each day – and this has contributed to our continued success in the practice,” said Rhonda Huff, one of the original Dream Team members, the self-described original five women who helped start the practice.

The Team regularly sees children from all socio-economic backgrounds and, for those who can’t afford dental care, the Team provides its services through programs such as Operation Smile and Give a Kid a Smile. **FW**

“Knowing that every day we can change just one little kid’s life, even if it is so small no one may notice, makes this a special place to work,” said Paula Wells, financial coordinator.

“She (Merhoff) takes the time to talk with the kids on their level,” said Lisa Moore, dental assistant. “It they need a mouth wiped, fingernails cut or hair brushed she’ll do that. She is so giving of herself and her time.”

When discussing the success of the practice, Merhoff is quick to highlight her dedicated staff. “I don’t make this practice. It’s the team,” she said. “It has always amazed me how she could hire all these women that are all different, but we all mesh together and form a great team...the Dream Team,” said Denna Rominger, registered dental hygienist. “Dr. Tina has a wonderful skill for hiring people that complement what she has developed.”

Merhoff’s influence as a pediatric dentist is shaping the future of many who are near and dear to her. Her younger sister, Kimberly, a general dentist who recently practiced part-

time with Dr. Tina, is currently pursuing residency training in pediatric dentistry. Two staff members’ daughters are entering the dental field and one former patient, Stellena Caudill, was so inspired during her years as a patient, that she recently earned her dental assistant certification from Wake Forest University and joined the staff last year.

It’s Okay to GET MAD

Merhoff and her team have enjoyed great success and rewards throughout the years and they look forward to teaming up with more families to actively participate in maintaining their child’s oral health. Dr. Tina’s father-in-law, who died a month after she opened her practice, must certainly look down at his protégé and say ‘job well done.’ He would also likely approve of her instituting one of his business adages: GET MAD – Get Everyone To Make a Difference.

Again, a simple, little principle we could all take to heart.



Dr. Tina Merhoff and Associates Pediatric Dentistry



Happy St. Patricks Day



March is now upon us, lets make this a month of healthy and happy smiles together. Dr. Tina Merhoff, Dr. Amy Davidian and Team are dedicated to making your childs oral health our top priority. Please contact our staff if you have any questions that will make this holiday more enjoyable for you and your family.