

THE PANTAGRAPH

CONNECTING CENTRAL ILLINOIS

Twin City dentist keeps focus on work, play

By Nancy Steele Brokaw

FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

Dentist and golfer Mike Milligan believes he's found a secret to success: focus.

"I've always been able to focus in anything I've ever done," Milligan says.

In dentistry, focus is vital. "You must concentrate on a very small area," Milligan says. "Bacteria are tiny and (dental) restorations must be carefully sealed."

Perhaps it's a lifetime of focusing- both at work and on the golf course- that has given Milligan another gift. His personality emanates an inner stillness.

Patients seldom-if ever- want to be in a dentist's chair but a gentle stillness is a good quality to find in the guy coming at your face with an injection or sharp metal tools.

Milligan said he went into dentistry because it's a great way to help others. "That's what it's really all about," he said.

With a staff of seven, Milligan takes care of the dental needs of 30 to 40 patients Monday through Thursday.

His brother Dan practices den-

tistry next door, and the two share a large X-ray machine. However, like most dentists, each keeps a separate practice.

"I'm not sure I could work for anybody else," Mike Milligan says. "I'm just so independent."

That independence is something he prizes about the sport of golf. "It's not a team sport. You don't have to depend on teammates or judges - just your score."

Milligan's scores are consistently low.

He won his first golf trophy at the age of 13 and has won more than a hundred tournaments.

Milligan was a standout on the University High golf team and later played for Oklahoma State University and the University of Houston, where teammates included Fuzzy Zoeller and Bruce Lietzke.

Milligan won the Illinois State Amateur in 1974 and the Butler National Amateur in 1994. He's won the Bloomington-Normal Match Play Tournament four times and the Bloomington-Normal Medal Play Tournament six times. Milligan even has a list of his holes-in-one.



The Pantagraph/LORI ANN COOK

Mike Milligan filled a cavity for Robyn Arnold of Bloomington with the help of dental assistant Linda Schaefer.

Now, at age 50, his golf time is mostly spent coaching his four children, all of whom played in the state golf tournaments for University High School. In the winter, Milligan helps organize large national tournaments for amateurs. Milligan's handicap has gone from a plus-three (that's three below par) to a minus one.

That means he still consistently shoots between par and 76 during his thrice-weekly rounds of golf. Milligan replaces his clubs every 10 years or so but still relies on the same putter he used in high school.

"I love the competition," Milligan says with the I-don't-need-trash-talk tone that athletes fear. "There's nothing like the feeling of getting off a good, clean shot."

Milligan graduated first in his class at Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine and does more continuing education "than anyone else I know." Special fields of interest are cosmetics, veneers, and implants.

On this Monday, Milligan is seeing patients by 7:30 a.m. Most of the people reclined on chairs in one of the five treatment rooms are patients who show up every three to six months for routine preventative care.

The 10-year-old in Room Two, however, is no one's regular patient. Her grandmother took her to a dentist last year and the girl was so terrified she refused to open her mouth.

He's met lots of people, young and old, with dental phobias. They are afraid of injections, pain and the unknown. He loves to hear once-frightened patients say, "That wasn't so bad." This girl's terror is no match for Milligan's gentleness.

Using the magnifying lens at-

tached to his glasses, Milligan discovers that among the girl's crooked teeth are an abscessed tooth and several cavities. He and the grandmother discuss and decide on a plan of treatment. Down the hall, another patient is "getting numb" from a shot of Novocain.

She doesn't look particularly nervous.

"Doctor Mike" (as many patients call him) is ready to work on the woman, a regular patient who hasn't had to have anything more than a cleaning in 10 years. Today, however, Milligan must remove a filling on Tooth 29 and extract the decay beneath. Milligan checks the dark spot on the X-ray several times as he works. His assistant places tool after tool-mirror, pick, probe and others-into his gloved hand. The white composite filling is delicate to construct because it has three surfaces, Milligan explains as he works. The patient has a furrowed brow, but her hands are still.

Milligan hardens the composite with a blue light then has the woman bite a piece of red paper to be certain that her alignment is correct. Finally, he uses a piece of floss to clean between her teeth. She's done.

"My mouth feels huge," says the woman, touching her cheek. "Can I eat lunch?" Milligan assures her the numbness will wear off and says soup or a milkshake might be a good choice for lunch.

"That wasn't bad at all," she says, planting her feet on the floor and gathering her purse and sunglasses.

"That's good to hear," says Milligan, a soft smile spreading across his face.



Mike Milligan prepared to fill a cavity for patient Robyn Arnold.