

Capture the Moment

The JDT recently sat down with **Jon Berry, CDT**, of Norcross, Ga., to learn more about his dual-career of dental laboratory owner and professional photographer.



How long have you been in the dental technology profession?

I started fresh out of high school in 1974 as a summer job, receiving on-the-job training in a large Midwest lab. They started me at the plaster and packing bench of the denture department. I opened Berry Dental Lab in July of 1987 with the idea that I would stay small enough to keep reign over our quality, provide a workplace environment unlike any that I had ever worked, and hopefully provide unparalleled service to our customers. We are still working with some of the dentists we started with in '87 and my employees were with me for most of those years. After 44 years, I believe this has been the longest running "summer job" anyone has ever had!

Can you tell me about your career path?

Ha! The Long and Winding Road! After two years of packing dentures, the monomer was

drying out my hands and causing cracks in the tips of my fingers; which were quite painful as I was a bass player in a rock band at the time. After requesting a move to another department, they had an opening in the porcelain department for a builder. I spent the better part of the next six years learning and excelling at all phases of the ceramic bench, to the point of regularly meeting the QC expectations and assigned workload, as well as taking on the roles of production planning for the ceramic department and quality control supervisor on the final check-out bench. We were doing about 100+ units a day with three model techs, three metal finishers, two waxers, and three ceramists. We all stayed busy!

In 1981, my wife and I moved from the way too cold state of Kansas down to Georgia and I became the porcelain department manager at a small lab in Gainesville, Ga. The owner at that lab encouraged me to join him and test for the CDT exam that was coming up the following March. We tested together on both the practical and written tests, and I received my CDT in Ceramics in 1982. Last November 2017, I was honored to receive my 35-year CDT Certificate and Patch at the GDLA meeting.

Over the following years, I worked at several other small to medium sized labs as a production manager or department manager, mostly teaching techniques to experienced technicians, or teaching new employees on certain job tasks in the department.

By 1986, I knew I wanted to go out on my own and so I started buying lab equipment and supplies. My wife and I moved into a really large "estate" house in the country in 1987 and put the lab into a couple large unneeded spare rooms. Within about a year and a half, we had grown to the point we had to move into a commercial space and start hiring employees. We've been in business as Berry Dental Lab here in Peachtree Corners ever since. We have always been a small lab, trying to make a big difference!



What inspired you to launch a photography business?

My dad gave me a box camera when I was about seven and then a few years later bought me an SLR film camera. I've been shooting for nearly as long as I can remember. We had our own darkroom and bought black and white film in bulk rolls and loaded our own cases, so I've always had a camera in my hands. When I opened the lab, I made it a point to offer intra-oral photography as a service for my dentists. I was already being called out for helping them pick shades and it was just a natural progression to doing the photography. I switched to digital cameras around 2006 and found a lot of opportunities to shoot a variety of different subjects. One thing led to another and as people became more and more familiar with my work, they began to ask me to photograph different events. My first "gig" was shooting a fashion show near downtown Atlanta, which led to shooting the annual "Oscar Night Atlanta" Charity Event, which I did for a number



of years. Then I was asked to shoot the Blue Angels pilot's party at "Angels Over Atlanta" which was hosted by the fine people at Children & Family Resources, Marietta, Ga., who did the Oscar Night events. That led to an ongoing aviation photography track that has taken me all over the country from Georgia to California and Florida to Wisconsin, shooting airplanes in flight. As side gigs, I shot Atlanta Falcons games and team events with a local radio personality and was also asked to shoot the eventual winner of the Mrs. Georgia pageant. I was even asked to shoot my friend Phil Gold for a "Who's Hot" edition of the JDT a few years ago. The Georgia Dental Lab Association has had me photograph their meetings and events for over 10 years.

Mostly though, I spend my time shooting warbirds and aerobatics in flight. The hardest photography there is happens to be shooting with a long telephoto lens at extremely low shutter speeds, while hand holding the heavy 12lb lens/camera combination, over my head, while panning to keep

the plane tack sharp. Not many can do it and it's impossible to do without a great deal of practice.

What do you like best about each profession? Any correlations?

Honestly - it's the challenge! Both professions, done well, are very hard to do. At the end of a hard day at the technician bench, I can look at the work of my hands and feel good about what I have done; that someone is going to have a beautiful restoration that will change their life forever. I've seen patients who have covered their mouths in shame while they talk and they didn't even realize they were doing it, and then actually "blossom" into a beautiful smile after their new restoration was seated. They go into a state of what we call a "perma-grin." It is as fulfilling as it gets for what we do in the background.

Likewise, when I have captured a P-51 Mustang (the sexiest and most deadly aircraft of World War II), tack sharp and with a full prop circle, screaming by on a low pass with a



6 unit bridge, anterior views

buttery background blur and the old WWII veteran passenger has his fist raised in celebration, as they go by - you know you've captured the "moment." The "moment" is what photographers live by; it means everything.

In both professions, I've had the honor of meeting some wonderful people who have changed my life. Most notably have been the WWII veterans in the 8th Air Force Historical Society of Georgia. What an amazing group of national heroes!

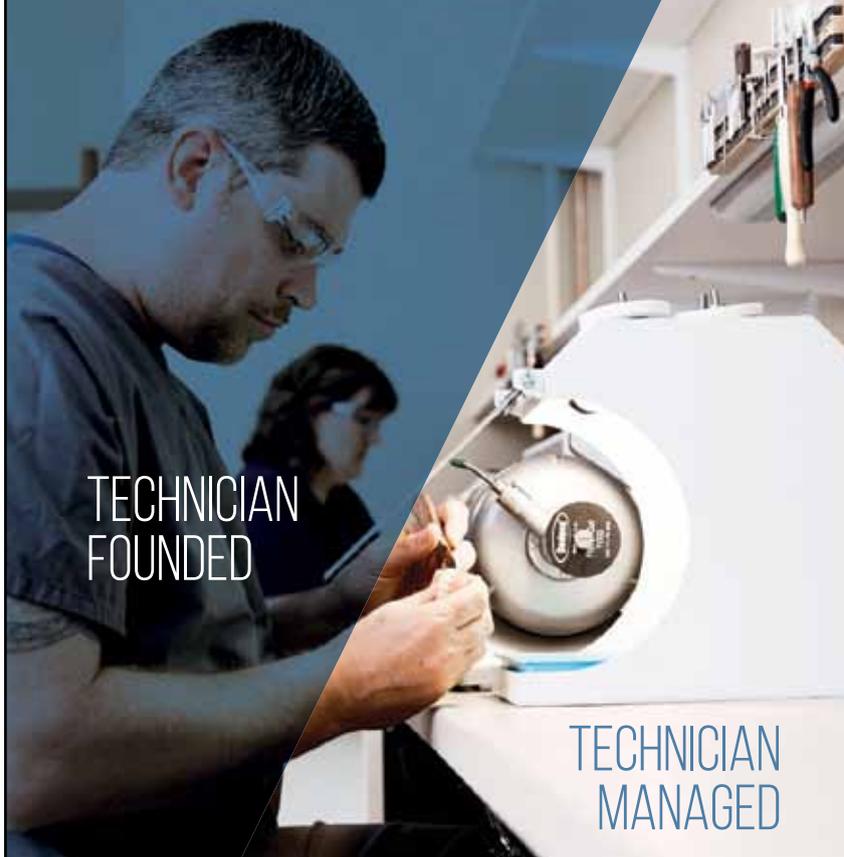
Both careers crystalize hard work, a quest for excellence, a dedication and tenacity to achieve the highest standards and require a work ethic unlike anything else I know of. One teaches the other in intangible ways and informs the other in the work of our hands that result from all that dedication.

Do you always want to continue both interests?

Oh, of course! For as long as I'm able to work, I will be involved in dental technology, and for as long as I'm able to hold a camera, I will certainly be shooting something.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Well, it wouldn't make me sad to be looking down from heaven by then; but if I'm still here in 10 years I'll be 72. I would like to think I could still contribute to dental technology, possibly in a teaching role with a lab that still has a respect and dedication to preserve the kinds of things that can't be replicated by machines. We are a rare breed of people who are artisans as much as we are production workers. That skill set isn't held by everyone and we need to preserve and encourage people with those innate capabilities to excel and prosper as the next generation comes along and replaces us "old dogs." We have a lot to offer and this new class of technicians has the ability to become world class life changers. That's what we do. We change lives one tooth at a time, and as long as we are committed to excellence, that commitment spills over into all our other interests. **JDT**



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