

orthotown[®]

A division of Farran Media

real orthodontics for real orthodontists

October 2022 • Vol. 15, Issue 8

*Drs. Nick Riccio and
Susan Blair divvy up the
cases at their practice
outside Chicago*

Hinsdale Ortho



As seen in orthotown



As seen in **orthotown**



Office Visit

Orthodontists spend most of their working hours inside their own practices, so they usually don't get many opportunities to see what it's like inside another doctor's office.

Orthotown's recurring Office Visit profile offers a chance for Townies to meet their peers, hear their stories and get a sense of how they practice.

Hinsdale Ortho

Dr. Susan Blair is credentialed in both pediatric dentistry and orthodontics, while **Dr. Nick Riccio** has a single specialty as well as the energy of a dozen doctors

by **Sam Mittelsteadt**, editor and creative director

These Townies met while doing their orthodontic residencies at Montefiore Medical Center in New York, then ended up marrying and moving to the Chicago suburbs, where the double-credentialed Dr. Susan Blair practices both orthodontics and pediatric dentistry and Dr. Nick Riccio not only practices orthodontics but runs a local study club he founded.

In this month's Office Visit, we learn how the couple balances multiple practices with parenthood and partnership, and their secrets to getting more done every day.



Office Highlights

Names:

Dr. Nick Riccio,
Dr. Susan Blair

Graduated from:

Dr. Riccio: Haverford College (undergrad); University of Pittsburgh (dental school); Montefiore Medical Center (orthodontic residency)

Dr. Blair: Oklahoma State University (undergrad); University of Oklahoma (dental school); Montefiore Medical Center (pediatric dentistry and orthodontic residencies)

Practice name:

Hinsdale Ortho,
Hinsdale, Illinois
hinsdaleortho.com
@hinsdaleortho

Practice size:

4,100 square feet,
8 operatories

Team size:

2 orthodontists,
4 clinical technicians,
1 records coordinator,
1 financial coordinator,
1 treatment coordinator,
2 scheduling coordinators,
1 in-house lab coordinator

When you met, Dr. Blair had already completed a two-year pediatric dentistry residency at Montefiore Medical Center, and you both started the three-year orthodontic program in the same class year. What was that setting like for you?

Dr. Susan Blair: Montefiore is an amazing hospital to work for and train in. I was able to work with very talented practitioners from a range of medical and dental specialties. While working on those interdisciplinary teams, I developed an interest in the treatment of complex craniofacial issues such as patients with cleft lips and palates. (And that's where I met Nick, so it's a pretty special place for me personally and professionally.)

Dr. Nick Riccio: I'm blushing! Residency at Montefiore was an intense, full-time job for me—with hours of homework every night, too—and made me the confident orthodontist I am today. But befriending



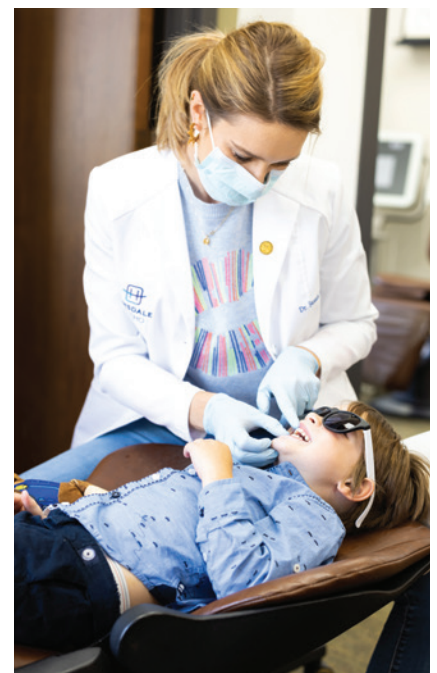
and ultimately falling in love with Susan often made it seem like play, and we have some wonderful memories of extracurriculars with our co-residents, who are some of our dearest friends to this day.

What drew each of you to specialize in orthodontics?

NR: A mentor of mine in dental school encouraged me to think about the patient base I'd be treating when considering a specialty. I immediately thought of ortho because most patients are fun, impressionable youths and I love to teach. (I had been accepted as a NYC teaching fellow before committing to dental school.) My mentor was more right than he knew, though, because I now understand orthodontics is the perfect job for me because it affords the opportunity to be a teacher three times over—with the patients I coach

through treatment, with the team members I motivate and train, and with members of my progressive Masterminds study club. It could not have worked out better!

SB: My first love is pediatric dentistry, which I practice out of my own office in a northern suburb. While in pediatric residency, I was exposed to a lot of orthodontics and really enjoyed it. I also elected to work on the craniofacial team with world-renowned dental specialists and plastic surgeons, and I made the choice to become a dual-board certified specialist in both pediatric dentistry and orthodontics so I could continue to work on complex cases. I believed it was important to have a thorough understanding of both specialties so I could be an authority on children's facial growth and development and make a meaningful contribution to their care.





Dr. Blair's dual certifications must have made her highly coveted as a hire! Where did you end up going after graduation?

NR: We looked at all of our favorite cities—Denver, Boston and Philly, as well as our hometowns of Chicagoland and Oklahoma City. Susan was indeed a hot ticket and got some amazing opportunities presented to her, which was incredible to witness.

SB: Yes, I am rare, and that allows me to be choosy. We both wanted to work for mentors who could teach us high-end, high-customer-service orthodontics, as well as important lessons in marketing, sales and business. So we both found positions in the suburbs of Chicago, working in offices that use the Damon system, which turned out to be a great indicator of practices in which we could learn from mentors who were expert clinicians and masters of business and management.

Then, Dr. Blair was emailed by a doctor who was interested in selling his highly coveted practice to her specifically—a practice that had been family-owned for 65 years.

SB: Because I was dual-boarded in pedo/ortho, he thought I was the only one who could properly carry on his legacy. We both believed in the importance of airways and facial growth and development, early interceptive and two-phase treatments, and treating patients with special needs—all things that are not straightforward and require a deeper understanding to treat confidently. We hit it off, and the rest is history.

NR: I especially love when he realized Susan's husband was also an orthodontist; I'll never forget him saying, "Susan is perfect for carrying on my legacy, and I'm sure Nick will be great, too."

But once he got to know more about me and my passion for teaching and the marketing/sales side of ortho, he became just as excited for the contributions I would be able to make to growing his legacy. That felt pretty good.



Before



After



Dr. Susan Blair shares one of her favorite patient cases

I tend to form strong bonds with patients who are referred to me because of their special needs or complex craniofacial issues, which require my unique training and skills, so it's nearly impossible to choose just one favorite case, but Grace is a great example for a few reasons.

Grace and I connected immediately. Despite being nearly nonverbal and having hearing deficits, she has outstanding energy and humor and is actually a great communicator; she just uses her very expressive nonverbal charm to get her thoughts (and, often, zingers of jokes!) across. I love sharing her story because it shows how I work closely with my team to deliver the needed treatment I was honored to provide.

Grace has a high-tech mobile wheelchair we can treat her from. With the help of a clinical technician, we quickly got into a routine that allowed us to treat her to the best possible outcome without many compromises. It was challenging for us to work in nontraditional positions, with lots of physical limitations for operator and patient, and we had to develop unique solutions to manage her care. But we got it done as a team, and had a blast with Grace the entire time.

We never focused on the limitations of treating her case, just the things we could control to improve her smile and bite. This yielded a result we're all proud of—and, moreover, a friendship I'm proud to share with Grace!

You just celebrated four years as practice owners. What does a "typical day" in the office look like nowadays?

NR: We are a husband-and-wife superduo! Susan works at and runs her own pediatric practice basically full time, but also makes time to put on her orthodontist cap with me one day per week at our ortho office. That day is jam-packed with the most complex cases, which have been sent our way from far and wide for her expertise.

I see patients here every day, and somehow manage to squeeze in time to run the practice as the manager, CEO, marketing director and board member. It's an incredible amount of work and responsibility, but each day is full of learning and growth, which I love.

It takes a great amount of help and support from our amazing team to accomplish all that we do. We share a vision and trust that has been developed over the past four years, which is how I'm able to treat patients to the highest of standards clinically while offering an exceptional customer experience and fostering the growth of our practice with cool marketing and advertising projects.

SB: I spend a lot of time juggling running my pedo office, doing OR sedation cases out of the hospital in our town, and seeing ortho patients with Nick at our office. We often get sent patients as young as 4 or 5, because referring colleagues know I'm the only one around who can do that. I love my day at Hinsdale Ortho—it's really special to feel like a superhero!

What's the hardest part about running two locations?

SB: Maintaining balance with two practices and a personal life. After all, we are also parents of an amazing 4-year-old boy named Massimo, who demands a lot of our attention and energy.

Making sure everything is running smoothly at home and in two small businesses—each with its own cast of characters and issues that arise—is by far the most challenging part of being an owner, but it's so worth the effort.

What are you most excited about from the clinical perspective?

NR: For me, it's smile design. Five key features make the most ideal Hinsdale Ortho smile: ideal gum height and shape;



showing 100% of the upper teeth; proper tooth shape; pleasing smile arc; and wide smile. We try to achieve all five on every case. This clinical puzzle involves more than just having a sharp mind and artistic eye; for best results, doctors must be proficient with 3D diagnosis and digital treatment planning; ideal bracket positioning for pleasing smile arc and display; the Damon philosophy for wide, full smiles; laser gum sculpting for proper gum height and shape; and enamel contouring for symmetrical and proportional incisal edges and embrasures.

SB: For me, it's the opportunity to treat patients with very complex interdisciplinary issues. I get to know these patients and their families very well during treatment, which can involve special appliances, extra appointments and phone calls to numerous practitioners, as well as TLC and sometimes a years-long relationship of various phases of treatment. By the end, I always seem to have made a special friend for life. That's very rewarding in the otherwise fast-paced world of orthodontics, where it often feels

like kids are in and out of treatment so quickly, you don't get to share nearly as much of their lives with them.

The previous doctor relied on his longstanding community ties to get the word out about his practice and didn't do much if any marketing. How have you approached it?

NR: We've developed a strategy that markets our practice in as many traction channels as possible. With competition in every direction, we do all the normal things everyone else does to encourage internal referrals from patients and external referrals from colleagues, as well as Google ads and SEO, but we also try to get creative.

For example, we've done patient appreciation events where I hop on our human-powered Blender Bike to blend up smoothies on a corner next to our office in downtown Hinsdale. The local newspaper came out to photograph us and write a story, which was basically free advertising (and also really fun).

If you're truly growth-minded, you should try all kinds of marketing and see what sticks. We've tried billboards, bridal expos and branded just-about-everything: beach bags, beach towels, can coolers, you name it. If it works, keep it rolling; if not, drop it and try something else. But above all, have fun with it!

We have an in-house social media person who's actually our records coordinator but also happens to be a professional photographer on the side. She helps us take great photos for social media, posts fun content, runs contests and even does a lot of our design work. And when we're looking for inspiration and new marketing ideas, we look at what's working elsewhere. Often, this comes from outside our industry, because it can be fun to adapt original ideas to orthodontics, but we also look at what's working for other dental offices. (Orthotown makes a great resource for that!)

You're quite invested in creating training and growth opportunities for team members.

NR: Oh, yes! One of my favorite parts about being a practice owner is teaching, especially my team. During COVID-19, we noticed there was less opportunity to go to formal conferences, which we used to really enjoy, so we started putting on our own CE events once a month: I'll put together lectures to teach something new, we watch prerecorded lectures from all sorts of excellent speakers and I've given reading assignments with book reports.

We have six core values as an office, and one of my favorites is to be encouraging, which in this context means supporting my team's future success, especially in terms of self-development of their character and abilities. I even created a wellness program at the office in which team members are encouraged to demonstrate personal or professional growth however they can and they're compensated for their efforts.

I see myself as a coach; I enjoy motivating and inspiring others to achieve their goals. Most orthodontists have access to patients they can inspire, but I'm grateful I also have progressive colleagues from my Masterminds

Top Products



i-Cat FLX 3D CBCT (KaVo Kerr), pictured above: This ultralow-dose CBCT provides 3D imaging that is invaluable for diagnosing and treatment-planning our cases, and does so with less radiation than a traditional 2D panoramic machine. We would not practice without it.

Damon Q2 self-ligating bracket with variable torques (Ormco): This high-tech bracket allows us to treat complex cases more comfortably and efficiently, with less need for jaw surgery, headgear, expanders and extractions of perfectly healthy permanent teeth. Using Damon mechanics exclusively with these brackets helps us achieve the widest, most attractive smiles possible, which is our hallmark in the community.

Sarver recontouring burs (Brasseler): We use the "donut" and "Hershey kiss" burs from this kit to offer aesthetic tooth manicuring to re-create symmetrical and proportional incisal edges and embrasures for worn-down, chipped or irregular teeth. Artistic manicuring is another signature of our practice;

some patients even come in just for that treatment without ortho proper, and it is something Dr. Nick really enjoys offering.

Spark clear aligners (Ormco): These aligners are clinically proven to be clearer and more stain resistant than the leading competitor, and are universally preferred by our patients because of the superior appearance and comfort.

Spectralase 980 soft-tissue laser (Spectrum Lasers): This powerful and precise machine allows us to painlessly expose teeth and establish the ideal gum height and shape our patients want to achieve their dream smile. It is a special added value of treatment at our practice.

Blender Bike (Rock the Bike): We whip up delicious and healthy smoothies for our patient appreciation events (and really anytime a patient needs a cold, soothing treat) with this unique, human-powered miracle machine. It's front and center behind reception, a great conversation piece, and an even better workout!



Check out Dr. Nick Riccio's Masterminds lecture series!

Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business by Gino Wickman is one of the books that inspired Dr. Nick Riccio's recent study club lecture, "Marketing 101 for Masterminds." To check out Riccio's complete Masterminds series on YouTube, click the link inside the digital edition of this article at orthotown.com/magazine.

study club and a motivated team who genuinely wants to learn and grow with me.

What sort of work is involved in the study club? How do you find and recruit members?

NR: The club is my newest outlet for being encouraging, and it might be the most work yet! I spend a few hours every day reading books, composing lectures, recruiting speakers and sponsors and otherwise strategizing for our meetings, and that effort really adds up over a couple of months.

Most people are familiar with local study clubs, where you come and get a free dinner and CE, and the prepackaged study-club-in-a-box types, but Masterminds is a free study club that's more progressive and original. I try to have less than 25% of meeting content be clinical, and fill the rest with high-yield topics of interest to growth-minded docs such as leadership, sales, mindset, financial planning and

wellness. Members include specialists from each topic as well as general dentists from surrounding communities.

I started by recruiting area friends and colleagues, then new potential friends and colleagues within a 10-mile radius and the more progressive student doctors at Midwestern University and the University of Illinois at Chicago—all while telling everyone to spread the word. So far, it's been growing very nicely.

All in addition to a full clinical practice day?

NR: It's very labor-intensive, but I love it. On my current wellness journey—I've lost more than 75 pounds so far—I run anywhere from five to 15 miles per day and use that time to listen to audiobooks as source material for future Masterminds lectures.

I need about two hours a day at the beginning for researching and composing the lectures; then, as things come together,



I need a couple of hours per day to recruit sponsors or speakers and plan the event. As things get really close, I need a few hours to finalize all the details, confirm the guest list and make sure events go off without a hitch.

With six to eight weeks to prepare and a consistent level of effort, all that is pretty doable while managing a full clinical practice day and reserving quality time with my family.

You recently completed a rebrand of the practice. What did that involve?

NR: We worked with Neon Canvas for a year to create our renewed “brand story,” complete with new logo and color scheme (which I agonized over for months).

It also included a new photojournalistic website and all the graphic design, marketing, advertising and social media that went along with it.

What is life like for you as a family outside the practice?

SB: We spend as much time as possible with our son, Massimo. He is smart, funny and adventurous, and we love making memories with him. When we’re in town, we like doing everything as a family, whether it’s going on a date night to dinner or the movies; “Friday Family Game Night,” which are Mo’s favorites; or into the city to see friends and visit museums. We spend a lot of time at our lake house in Indiana, where Mo’s favorite is “Hot Tub Saturday Night.” You get the idea—he’s our little prince.

We also love to travel with him, and take him to visit our friends in Puerto Rico, New York, Los Angeles and Oregon, as well as family in Oklahoma City. Family and friends are what’s most important to us, so we’re always planning and looking forward to some adventure we’re going to share with loved ones. ■

