



Exceptional family,
Dr. Alexia M
**Exceptional
Dentistry**

Dr. Alexia Murray (from left), Dr. Ted Murray and Dr. Kristen Berning, of Exceptional Dentistry, in Dubuque.
Photos by Nicki Kohl



The lobby of Exceptional Dentistry, in Dubuque.

Ted Murray's daughters follow him into the practice

BY SCOTT SALWOLKE

Dr. Ted Murray, DDS, seemed content in his practice. He'd been a dentist for more than 20 years in Dubuque and was satisfied being the sole practitioner for his clinic.

What he hadn't foreseen was that first one daughter, then another, would follow in his footsteps and become dentists. And, that they would become integral members of his clinic.

"I was settled into being solo," Murray said. "Eighty-five percent of associateships don't work statistically. There are just some kind of frictions or egos or who knows what. I hadn't really given any thought anymore to bringing in someone."

Murray's daughter Dr. Kristen Berning, DDS, didn't expect to become a dentist either.



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"When I was in college I knew I wanted to do something with math or science," Berning said. "It wasn't until my junior year when I was job shadowing other dentists up in Twin Cities that I decided that this was my career path. I had volunteered in hospitals for a year and decided I didn't want to work in a hospital as a doctor.

"During the summers I had helped out at Dad's office. I got a good sense of what a day was like in a dental office. Then when I was job shadowing in the Twin Cities I followed about six dentists and they all seemed to enjoy their job. They worked hard, but all toward a common goal."

It didn't hurt that she was attending the University of Iowa, the same school her father had attended.

"I graduated from Iowa in 1977 and it was one of the best dental schools to get into," Murray said. "It still is. All three of us have gone there. After that I did my residency in Iowa City where I had a lot of experience in surgery and general practice. I came back here and started my own clinic from scratch in 1978."

As his business expanded he outgrew his first location and the next one. That is when he decided to have a clinic built on Asbury Road.

For 22 years the building met his needs and probably would have continued to if Berning hadn't decided to come on board. He decided to build a new office farther west on Asbury.

"I had a sense of what I wanted from the last place" Murray said. "It was laid out all right, functionally, but some of the elements we picked might have been considered trendy. I wanted this to be more timeless. I also didn't want it to look or feel or smell like a dental office. So we went with something that all generations could feel comfortable in. Some of the materials, like the etched glass, could go back to the '40s, but I also wanted it to be modern."

EXCEPTIONAL DENTISTRY

Business: Exceptional Dentistry

Owner: Ted Murray

Location: 4200 Asbury Road, Dubuque, Iowa 52002

Telephone: 563-556-2711

Website: www.triexceptional.com/

Email: info@triexceptional.com

Hours: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Thursday

Services: Exceptional Dentistry offers dental care for patients, including advanced cosmetic dentistry, Invisalign, digital dentistry, restoration, teeth whitening and sedation dentistry.

Working with a designer out of Austin, Texas, the location opened in 2005. Berning would start the next year. The decision to build a spacious area proved to be fortuitous as another daughter was about to enter the practice.

"I graduated a year ago and had been working in Kansas City in a private practice," said Dr. Alexia Murray, DDS. "I wanted to see what other offices were like. I went to another office not really knowing how it would affect me, but it convinced me to come back here. There's a lot of momentum here."

In contrast to her sister, Alexia had known that she wanted to be a dentist.

"I definitely knew by my sophomore year of college, but it was something always in the back of my mind. I've always liked art and science. That's one of those cliché things dentists seem to say, but it happened to be the case with me. I liked painting and pottery and science in school. And seeing the things my dad did with patients. It was always a positive experience for them."

It wasn't until his daughters joined that

Murray realized the burden it had been to be the sole practitioner.

"It was actually kind of a relief having them on board. I could sit down at the desk and do a document or a project. I just have more breathing space. We have two dentists working and a third on call so there is no interruption. We can give all our attention to the patients and don't have to worry about being interrupted."

There is no hierarchy to new patients. It's either which doctor is available or which one a patient prefers. Some prefer having a male dentist, others a female. Some might want someone older and others a younger one.

"Patients call in and like the family environment," Murray said. "The continuity of our family. We are Dubuquers and we aren't going anywhere. Our patients want to be well taken care of. They seek us out because we are a progressive practice, owing to our ongoing training."

According to Berning, her father made sure they were included in all aspects of the business.

"Delegating is something good leaders do. You identify strengths in your team and then delegate tasks to them so that they can be a leader in that area. When I joined in 2006 he had me learn a lot about the numbers and had me start running team meetings. He was there to back me up."

Murray's daughters also bring in different experiences and backgrounds.

"They came on board with things they could add. It was like adding clubs to my golf bag. They came in with pretty loaded backgrounds and knew the steps to take for the optimum care of a patient."

For Murray, the key to families working together is to have trust in one another.

"I just let them have at it from the beginning. If they're not comfortable with something, they'll let me know. I think you have to take that leap of faith with family members and see if they can take the next step."