

CATALYST



HEART-CENTERED DENTISTRY

DR. JASON NIEMEYER AND DR. JEFF PHILLIPS
OF SILVERDALE DENTAL CENTER

**DR. NIKI FALLAH'S BEAUTIFUL PEDIATRIC
AND ORTHODONTIC PRACTICE**
in Millbrae, California

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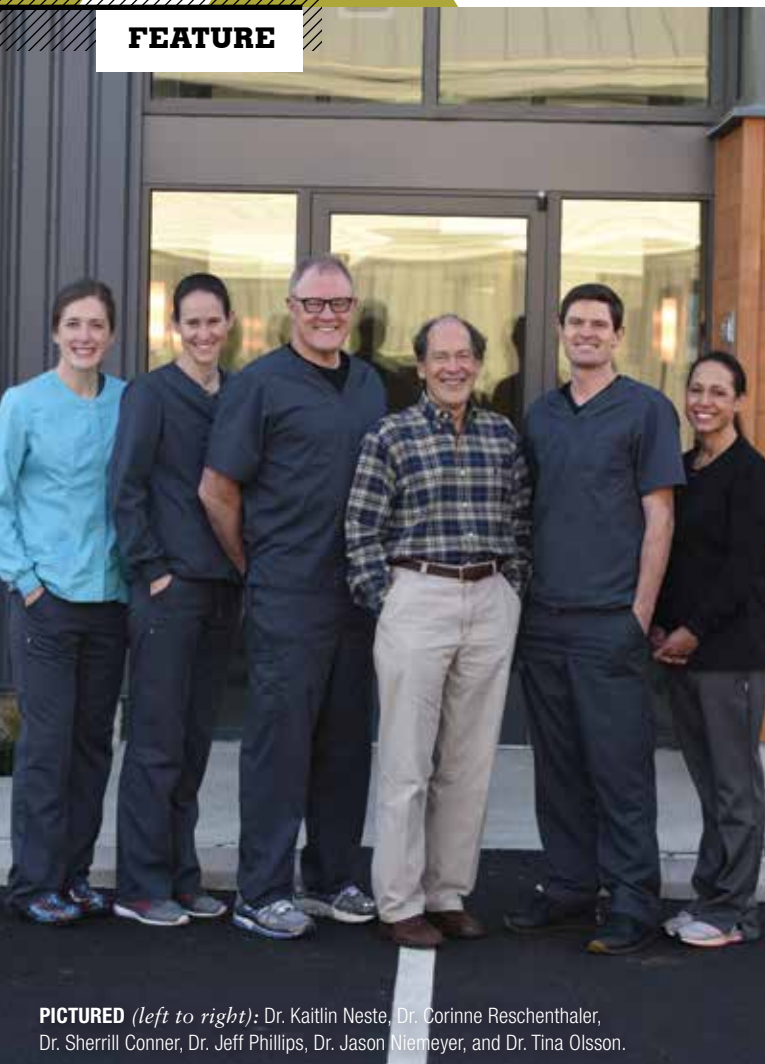
Dr. Jeff Phillips and Dr. Jason Niemeyer

HEART— CENTERED *dentistry*

BY ANNE BAER
PHOTOS BY JEFF HOBSON

Patient-focused. A family of friends. Warm and inviting. Relationship-centered. It's hard to know where to start describing Silverdale Dental Center, its crew and clinic. Situated at the end of Sinclair Inlet in Old Town Silverdale, Washington, Silverdale Dental has been in the same location for over 40 years, and until recently, in a converted home. Jeff Phillips is at the center of its beating heart, mentoring and leading the expansion, and nurturing a culture of patient-first philosophy.

At 70, Dr. Phillips radiates energy and enthusiasm, embodying the definition of a health care provider who emphasizes "care." A lifelong runner, outdoorsman, and self-described project guy, Dr. Phillips is an ardent supporter of team dentistry. "I have never been in a truly solo setting. I'm used to having someone who could cover and give me the freedom of an independent life." As Dr. Phillips tells it, Dr. Bruce Craswell, the founder of Silverdale Dental, was an entrepreneur ahead of his time. Originally started in 1968 by Drs. Herb Shinn and Bruce Craswell, the practice grew to include Jeff Phillips and Mike Morton in 1976. With only seven operatories (one dedicated to hygiene), out of necessity the four doctors were trend-setters in offering evening and Saturday appointments. Each doctor was an independent practitioner, rotating time in the office with a week off every two weeks. As Dr. Phillips points out, "With four of us seeing patients in such a tight space, we learned to be flexible. But there were great



PICTURED (left to right): Dr. Kaitlin Neste, Dr. Corinne Reschenthaler, Dr. Sherrill Conner, Dr. Jeff Phillips, Dr. Jason Niemeyer, and Dr. Tina Olsson.

THE TEAM WE
HAD MADE THE
DIFFERENCE. WE
JUST COULDN'T
HAVE DONE THIS
WITHOUT A
trusted team
—MONICA DUCHEMIN

benefits. You always had someone to cover for you, ensuring your patients got emergency care regardless of your own schedule. It allowed for time away giving me a chance to be a healthy dentist."

PROVIDING A GREATER CIRCLE OF CARE

With retirements and other changes in the group, Dr. Phillips became the building owner in 1990 and subsequently purchased an empty lot behind the original practice. At first, the lot was just a garden of high density blackberries, but it factored heavily in Dr. Phillips' dream of providing a greater circle of care in the future.

Fast forward to 2008 when, fresh out of dental school, Dr. Jason Niemeyer responded to an ad for an associate at Silverdale Dental. Dr. Phillips welcomed the energy and new perspective Dr. Niemeyer brought to the practice. The team was complete when Office Manager Monica Duchemin joined the staff. She brought exceptional management and people skills to the office, as well as her broad palette of talents. When Dr. Niemeyer transitioned from Associate to Partner, the doctors hired Dr. Marc Cooper of Mastery Company as their "Future-Guiding" dental consultant. Time had come to push ahead with plans to expand into Dr. Phillips' backyard blackberry lot. The stage was set for change.

FINAL PUSH TAKES SHAPE

It all started with a casual conversation not long after Dr. Niemeyer purchased half the practice in 2013: "Why not expand into the lot behind the office?" On an invitation from their long-time Burkhart Account Manager, Bill Melius, the doctors attended a seminar offered by Burkhart and co-hosted by A-dec and Bob Kramer, a dental CPA. At the seminar, the team was inspired to consider purchasing equipment in stages and employ the IRS' Section 179 tax deduction. With low interest rates available, the final push toward building a new space took shape.

A PERFECT CONSTRUCTION TEAM

The project concept was clearly aligned with Dr. Cooper's strong feeling that the future of dentistry is group practice. Dr. Cooper continues to coach Drs. Niemeyer and Phillips about operating as a Dental Entrepreneurial Organization (DEO).

All of Dr. Phillips' connections throughout the years helped build the perfect construction team before any ground was broken. The role of architect was filled with a long-time running club friend, Charlie Wenzlau, while another friend introduced them to Mike Brown of FPH Construction. Steve Stimson, Burkhart Equipment Specialist, referred them to Office Wraps, a Kirkland, Washington dental office interior design firm. One last team member, Maggie Boyle of The Dental Group (CPAs), was instrumental in keeping the project on budget and helping financially plan each step.

As office manager, Monica was at the helm of the project, allowing both Dr. Niemeyer and Dr. Phillips a truly exceptional experience throughout the process. "I felt it was their job to do the



One of Silverdale Dental's 17 operatories

dentistry and my job was to keep the project moving along," says Monica. "We continue that same model with me taking care of the staff and doctors so they can pour their energy into patient care."

THE LARGEST INFECTION CONTROL CENTER A-DEC HAS MANUFACTURED

Burkhart's Bill Melius was instrumental in setting up their initial A-dec visits. Bill introduced Andy Hayes, A-dec Manager, who was extremely helpful. "Two trips to A-dec were very informative and the ability to try out different options really helped," says Dr. Niemeyer. Bill also set up tours of offices nearby to get ideas and see what succeeded elsewhere. As Monica states, "The team we had made the difference. We just couldn't have done this without a trusted team. I could call Steve, and if he didn't know the answer, he would point me in the right direction." Since he knew the office flow so thoroughly, Bill also helped shape the design and set-up, knowing how the staff organized each area. "The sterilization area boasts the largest ICC (Infection Control Center) A-dec has ever manufactured," says Bill. "Knowing how Silverdale Dental's team works went a long way toward guiding their choices for cabinetry, delivery systems, and chairs."

GOAL TO KEEP WARM, FAMILY FEEL

When envisioning a new space for his growing practice, Dr. Phillips' main goal was to keep the warm, family feel of



Dr. Jeff Phillips and Dr. Jason Niemeyer



Dr. Jason Niemeyer



Dr. Jason Niemeyer, Dr. Jeff Phillips and Bill Melius (Burkhart Account Manager)



Their custom sterilization area is the largest A-dec has ever manufactured.



The pediatric area is fun and bright, with A-dec chairs being a highlight.

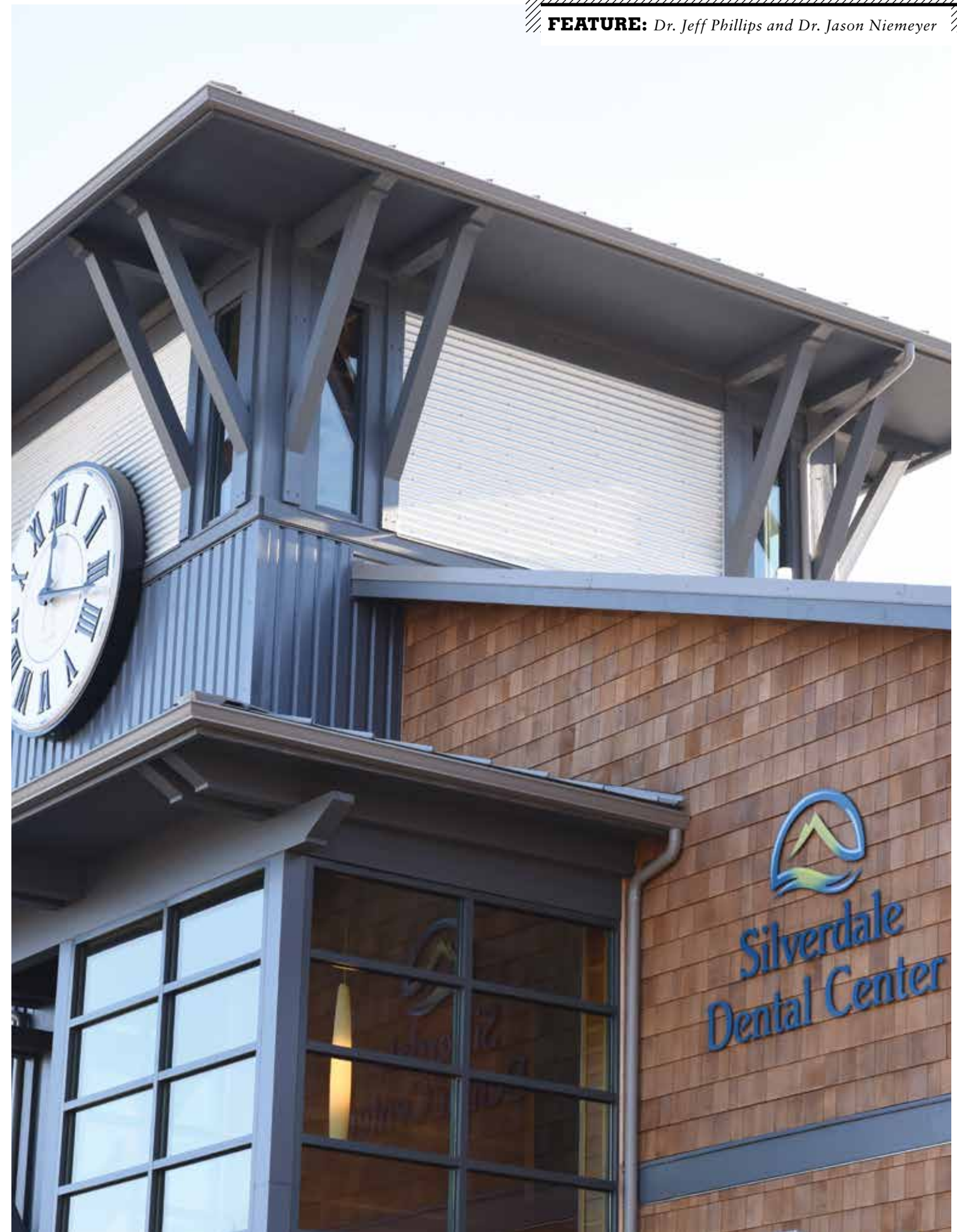
their old space. That proved to be a challenge for Monica. She recounts, "It wasn't merely to fit as many ops as we could in the new building. We needed to marry Dr. Phillips' vision of a warm, family feel with Dr. Niemeyer's more high-tech style. It required a lot of compromise, but the final result delights our patients and staff." After a few construction and financing hiccups, the crew moved to the new building in late February 2016. The practice includes 17 operatories, including five dedicated to hygiene and three open ops for pedo. Flexibility and consistency are built in to the design: endo carts can wheel in to any op; an endodontic operatory with microscope and surgical suite are available; and each operatory cabinetry is the same, providing efficient use of time when seeing patients, restocking supplies or training a new assistant. The space has none of the large, cold clinic feel, but offers a comfortable and comforting blend of warmth and top-flight design.

LONG-HELD BELIEF IN GOOD SYSTEMS

A central idea maintained throughout the practice is a long-held belief in good systems. For patients to experience the highest level of care, Dr. Phillips long ago created standardized references for each area of the practice. Using three-ring binders with pictures and step-by-step descriptions of how to do tray set-ups, make a retainer, and check-in a patient provide consistent and thorough training for the staff. For their current team of 30 to work smoothly and assist with eight different providers ranging from general dentistry to endo, they provide detailed instructions. Monica explains, "Each doctor has a main or lead assistant. Their second assistant sometimes floats due to our rotating schedule of doctors. Just like our doctors have specialties or areas of interest, the dental assistants also want to do more in each area. Any assistant can step in; that's where our manuals come in to play. It helps them learn specifics for each provider." The secret to both attracting and retaining that high level of assistant is selective hiring up-front. "Then because we are a large practice and are open a wide range of hours, we try to be very accommodating with their schedules and family lives," says Monica. "We take care to nurture our staff and have fun while working hard."

GETTING PATIENTS IN TO SEE SPECIALISTS WITHOUT LEAVING THE BUILDING

All the new space and trained staff are already well-utilized, welcoming an average of over 100 new patients per month. One of Dr. Phillips' goals was to provide comprehensive general and specialty care to his patients. Dr. Niemeyer explains the





The top-notch team at Silverdale Dental.

philosophy. "We can offer them everything here within our walls. So often, in the past, when we would recommend our patient see someone down the street, they didn't follow through. Now, we can get a patient in to see a specialist quickly, without having to leave our building. Our entire staff has been elevated through exposure to all specialties. We have higher quality assistants because they have to be flexible and learn many different styles and procedures."


Today, Silverdale Dental's providers include general dentists Dr. Jason Niemeyer, Dr. Jeff Phillips, Dr. Sherrill Conner, Dr. Corinne Reschenthaler, Dr. Grant Reschenthaler; pedodontist, Dr. Kaitlin Neste; periodontist, Dr. Tracy Scott; and endodontist, Dr. Tina Olsson.

The entire team adheres to a set of values set long ago by Dr. Phillips: Inform before you perform, no surprises. Create happy patients. Stay on time. Exceed our patient's service expectations. People before things. Offer treatment options. "These are the team values that have served us well. It's the way we treat our patients, ethically and honestly," says Monica.

PRACTICE INCLUDES PEDIATRIC CARE

The practice's "family orientation" is exemplified by the story of their pedodontist, Dr. Kaitlin Neste. Dr. Neste first came to the practice as a young patient then worked as a sterilization tech during college. After attending dental school, Dr. Neste elected to pursue pediatric dentistry. Although it was never a given, the team was thrilled when Dr. Neste joined the practice and now offers pediatric care. "(Silverdale Dental) is so patient-centered. We care about our patients as if they were family. Now, the fun is being on the other side and seeing all the things that go in to making that happen," relates Dr. Neste.

In reflecting on the unique professional environment at Silverdale Dental, Dr. Niemeyer describes, "Once in a while, there's a day when I'm by myself. It makes me realize how there's more stress on me with no one around for collaboration. I will have a longer career in dentistry because I have lower stress and have a great group of doctors around me."

Dr. Phillips sums it up as he looks around this dental home to so many patients and a welcoming space for the community. "This place is pretty unique and more of a 'heart thing'. I love the legacy of this place, the slow ethical growth that got us here, and the terrific partners I share it with. I am truly blessed." 



BY ANNE BAER
PHOTOS BY DR. JEFF PHILLIPS

JEFF PHILLIPS AND SMILE HIGH NORTH AMERICA

Some people have an extraordinary capacity for making connections, weaving together experiences and the people they meet into a fabric that provides far-flung comfort for others. When Dr. Jeff Phillips first visited Nepal in 2007 to compete in the Mt. Everest Base Camp Marathon, he did not know his connections from summers in Canada would shape his next adventure. "I knew I wanted to volunteer in either Nepal or Africa. Then one spring, our Rotary Group was invited to Nepal by a long-time friend from Vancouver Island (British Columbia, Canada), and I was hooked." A lifelong outdoorsman, he was attracted by both the incredible mountains and the simple joy found in the Nepali people.

In the past four years, Dr. Phillips has made five, month-long volunteer dental trips to Nepal. For two years he worked

with the Nepal Education Fund of Canada, a small charity that sponsors extremely poor children to attend school. Dr. Phillips self-funded these trips and created an extensive cache of surgical instruments, supplies, and equipment.

DESPERATE FOR DENTISTRY

The need for dental care in Nepal is staggering. With a population of 30 million, the country is served by just 500 dentists. Most citizens will not see a dentist in their lifetime. Dental caries and periodontal disease are rampant throughout the population with untreated pain and infection affecting nearly everyone.

In April 2015, an avalanche above Mt. Everest base camp rocked the area, killing 16 Sherpas who were preparing the climbing route for their Western clients. That day, Dr. Phillips emailed a climbing friend at base camp and



TOP: The village of Khumjung at an elevation of 12,500 feet. Home of the first "Hillary School" and site of dental camps. **MIDDLE:** Dr. Jeff Phillips, Russell Brice, Dr. Mingma Nuru Sherpa. Brice is owner of the Himalayan Experience and decade-long patron of SmileHigh. **BOTTOM:** Earthquake destruction in Kathmandu, April 2015.



Rebuilding in Namche Bazaar following the April 2015 earthquake.



A happy greeting with a villager in Khumjung.



High altitude sterilization set-ups include converted pressure cookers.

offered to bring his dental care to the Khumbu region of Mt. Everest in support of the Sherpa community. With the help of his climbing friends, Dr. Phillips met members of the Sherpa community living in the Seattle area and started preparations to bring a dental camp to the Khumbu.

HISTORY OF HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS IN THE KHUMBU

In 1953 after summiting Mt. Everest with Tensing Norgay Sherpa, Sir Edmund Hillary dedicated his life to enriching the lives of the Sherpa community. He helped build schools and hospitals throughout the Khumbu. The first school "Sir Ed" established was in Khumjung at 12,500 feet where Dr. Phillips arranged the dental camp. In a most serendipitous encounter, Dr. Phillips and his Nepali assistant/translator/dental student, Ngima Mendewa Sherpa, arrived in Khumjung on the last day of a dental camp conducted by SmileHigh of New Zealand. "Sir Ed" had supported and inspired Dr. Julian Haszard of New

Zealand and Dr. Mingma Sherpa of Nepal to create SmileHigh in 2003 to bring dental health and education to the Sherpa communities of the Khumbu.

A PARTNERSHIP FOR GOOD

Upon meeting, Drs. Haszard and Phillips immediately realized how beneficial they could be to each other. Dr. Phillips could learn from the decade-long experience of SmileHigh, and SmileHigh could benefit from exposure to the enormous dental market of North America.

Back in the U.S. in October 2015, Dr. Julian Haszard, Dr. Mingma Sherpa and SmileHigh's administrator, Trevor Moyle, met at Dr. Phillips' home to discuss their collaboration. The result was the creation of SmileHigh North America, led by Dr. Phillips as well as a mutual plan to develop a sustainable year-round dental clinic in Kathmandu. The three operator clinic, complete with dormitories and kitchen, would allow Western dentists an opportunity to spend a week in Kathmandu. They would

volunteer their dental services, pay rent for lodging, get a donor receipt for their good work, and have an opportunity to venture into the exciting countryside of Nepal for a trek, climb, or jungle adventure. The vision: the lodging fee would pay the rent for the clinic while the true winners would be the desperately poor of Nepal struggling with the ravages of dental decay, pain and infection.

ADDING A-DEC EXPERTISE

The next part of the adventure was when the SmileHigh/SmileHigh North America team flew to Washington D.C. to attend the American Dental Association (ADA) annual meeting. There they met with the ADA Foundation and another serendipitous encounter occurred, this time with Mariah Kraner, PhD, Professional Relations Manager of the A-dec Foundation.

Dr. Phillips was very familiar with A-dec Dental Manufacturing of Newberg, OR as he selected A-dec equipment for his new 17 operator dental center in Silverdale, WA. Meanwhile, Dr. Haszard had sketched out an architectural plan for the three operator dental facility envisioned as the SmileHigh Kathmandu Dental Center. Dr. Kraner was very interested in the SmileHigh Kathmandu project for a variety of reasons: SmileHigh had operated in Nepal for a decade; the Kathmandu clinic would be utilized full-time and managed by a Nepali dentist; it would provide free dental services from a Western volunteer dentist; and it would be nearly self-supporting due to the lodge fees charged to guest dentists.

All the threads of connection were coming together. Dr. Phillips spent most of January 2017 in Nepal visiting the Khumbu villages of Khumjung and Phortse, home of the Khumbu Climbing Center. While there, he provided treatment to needy villagers. Newly graduated from dental school in the Philippines, Dr. Ngima Mendewa Sherpa plans on taking the Nepal dental boards this spring. She is delighted about the possibility of managing the SmileHigh

Kathmandu Dental Center. Dr. Phillips and his pro bono lawyer friend, Brian Lawler, are busy completing the SmileHigh North America 501(c)3 non-profit application. Dr. Phillips plans to spend a month in Nepal this autumn, working in the Khumbu and finalizing plans for the SmileHigh Kathmandu Dental Center.

WHERE LUCK AND PURPOSE COLLIDE

Dr. Phillips feels blessed by the serendipitous events that have occurred in his life journey, providing adventure, good health, and purpose. His message to other dentists interested in sharing their skills is "stay healthy and be an asset!" *B*



Dr. Jeff Phillips hiking above Khumjung village.



A cheerful patient in Thame village.