



Photo by Matthew Desrosiers

Dr. John Purc (middle) is staying with the VDO for another year to finish work on his patients. To his left is wife Kathy, who also volunteers, and dental assistant Alana Bannister.

Dentist puts retirement on hold for VDO

By Matthew Desrosiers
Editor

When it comes to his patients, Dr. John Purc can't leave a job half done.

A dentist in Minden since 1970, Purc moved to the Highlands to open his practice after graduating.

"That's where I started," he said.

Purc sold his practice in 2008, but stayed on for another few years. He then decided to join the Volunteer Dental Outreach of Haliburton County (VDO) in December 2010.

"I had been retired and I knew there was a big need for dentists in the area," he said. "I thought, I don't mind doing that to help out, and I've been here ever since."

VDO board member Lisa Kerr remembers when Purc first came to the VDO.

"He attended the first start-up meeting in December 2010 and expressed how important it was for this community for the volunteer dental clinic to succeed because, based on his experience, there was an overwhelming need for people to have a place to have their dental work done who could not afford it," she said. "Dr. Purc volunteered almost every week since the clinic opened, sometimes twice per week."

Last year, Purc was at the VDO working one day each week. He said he accumulated a third of all the billings for the clinic, but was starting to think about retirement.

"I couldn't make up my mind, but I was sure it was time to pack it in," Purc said. "But when I talked to one of the dental assistants here, she said we don't have many dentists left for the winter."

That caused Purc to re-evaluate his plans. During his retirement party, he announced to members of the VDO and his friends that he

would retain his licence to practice for another year and continue to volunteer at the clinic.

"I had done a lot of patients and hadn't totally finished them," Purc said, adding that he currently has 486 patients in various stages of care. "Some are patients I did specialized dentistry on, and I still have some procedures that I'd like to finish for them."

"I felt I wanted to finish working on them and get their treatment completed."

Kerr said Purc's decision to stay on was a welcome surprise.

"We had arranged letters of congratulations from the president of the Ontario Dental Association, Barry Devolin and Laurie Scott to present at the [retirement party]," she said. "We were all delighted to put those letters on hold when Dr. Purc announced that ... he was not ready to retire and would agree to keep his licence to practice for one more year."

Kerr said that although the clinic has Dr. Kerr, Dr. Oldfin, Dr. Proctor, Dr. Tabri, Dr. Gray, and Dr. Butera as regular volunteers, having Dr. Purc stay means more patients will be seen in 2015.

"It also gives the board more time to find the three or four volunteers it will take to replace what Dr. Purc contributes to the VDO," she said.

For Purc, it's about helping people feel confident in their smiles again. To that end, he has spent a lot of time over his career studying and taking courses in specialized dentistry, like extractions and periodontal work, to better be able to help his patients. In fact, he met his wife Kathy on one such training course.

"[Helping these patients] makes me feel really good," he said. "The one case I did that was just amazing, is a young man came in and had a broke right upper lateral incisor. He wouldn't want to smile a lot, and he wanted to

get work but said 'I just don't feel confident in my smile.'"

Purc rebuilt the man's mouth and tooth for the patient.

"The next time I see him in Minden, he tells me he's getting married and is applying for a job. It's really neat."

The patients that come to the VDO are usually in dire need of dental care, he said.

"A lot of it is a real drastic need," Purc said. "They usually come in with really bad teeth, broken teeth or abscessed teeth, a lot of

missing teeth. A lot of them need a lot of work and haven't had their teeth cleaned for years."

The reason oftentimes is that they cannot afford the care, which is why the VDO is so important.

"These people need a lot, but if you could see the transformation of the before and after, it's amazing."

Purc will stay on with the VDO for the rest of the year, at least, he said. He's also going to try and recruit more dentists for the area.