

Dentists 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. *Dentaltown'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.

# Mattson Hellickson Dental

by Kyle Patton, associate editor

**Drs. Samuel Mattson** (at right in photo) and **Ben Hellickson** took *Dentaltown's* motto of "No dentist will ever have to practice solo again" to heart: The business partners met in college, attended the same dental school and have worked under the same practice roof since 2014, when they took over the practice of Mattson's father.

But as time went on and the aging building presented limitations and expensive workarounds, these Townies decided to break ground on a new build. Their careful planning and excellent execution won them the American Dental Association Design Innovation Award in 2021 in the large-scale new build category, and the gorgeous practice is now a keystone in the recently revitalized Beaverton, Oregon, community.

In our Q&A, we hear from both doctors on what went into creating a new practice—in the middle of the pandemic, no less—their tips for other Townies looking to start or refresh a build, what technologies grew their patient base and the underrated connections between clinical quality and office aesthetics.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRITCHELLE FALLESGON



## Office Highlights

**Names:**

Dr. Samuel Mattson, Dr. Ben Hellickson

**Education (both):**

Oregon State University;  
University of the Pacific School of Dentistry

**Practice:**

Mattson Hellickson Dental, Beaverton, Oregon  
mh.dental

**Practice size:**

12 operatories; 4,500 square feet

**Staff size:**

13

### How'd you find your way into dentistry?

**Dr. Ben Hellickson:** I've always had an interest in the sciences and had a wonderful dentist as a kid. It was when Sam introduced me to his father, Dr. Jim Mattson, that I knew I wanted to pursue a career in dentistry. He showed me the excitement that comes with mixing art, science, humanism and running a business.

**Dr. Samuel Mattson:** I've always looked up to my father, and have tried to emulate him to the best of my ability. This included his profession as a dentist. I always excelled in mathematics, sciences and anything involving hand-eye coordination, so this career path seemed like a great fit, but my father was definitely the reason I became a dentist.

### Walk us through your first meeting and where you both are today as colleagues and friends.

**BH:** Sam and I met at a fraternity rush event before entering as freshmen at Oregon State University. (Go, Beavs!) We both pursued degrees in microbiology with the goal of getting into dental school. We always spoke of practicing together and sure enough, that's what happened. Since 2014, we have worked together and formed Mattson Hellickson Dental, aka MH Dental. We built our dream practice in a blossoming part of downtown Beaverton, and recently expanded our practice to include a third dentist.

Personally, Sam and I have grown our families side by side. Our families vacation together and support each other, and I was honored when Sam agreed to be godfather to my son, Wyatt. We love to find time to hit the golf links, watch some OSU sports, or cheer on our Portland Trailblazers. We have been and continue to be the best of friends since the summer of 1997, which makes the success of Mattson Hellickson Dental that much sweeter.





**Before we get into your current office, let's get a feel of where you came from. Tell us about the first location and its limitations or challenges.**

**SM:** Our previous office was in Aloha, a suburb west of Portland. My father opened his practice there in 1978 and performed a major renovation in 1988. The practice went through several minor renovations throughout the years but was mainly unchanged from its original design.

When I joined the practice in 2004, my father made several layout changes to accommodate adding two additional operatories. We eventually expanded into the adjacent space and created an operational but disorganized layout: It was open and lacked privacy between operatories, which made the acoustics noisy. It was difficult to have the intimate conversations sometimes required when reviewing treatment plans, etc. There were designated X-ray rooms, which required patients to get up from the chair in the middle of treatment—sometimes



## Top Products

**Dentsply Sirona Cerec Primescan, Primemill and SpeedFire Dental Furnace.** The ability to make same-day restorations has been a game changer for our practice. Patients rave about the convenience of limiting commutes to and from the practice and appreciate our investment in the newest technology.

**Adec dental chairs, delivery systems and operatory cabinetry.** The form, function and ergonomics have made our appointments more comfortable and efficient. Patients love the elegant design and modern appearance of our new operatories.

**Dentsply Sirona CBCT.** Having the ability to accurately diagnose a multitude of difficult clinical conditions that conventional two-dimensional radiographs may not detect has been amazing. Also, the ability to overlay digital impressions for surgical implant placement and design, as well as clear aligner orthodontic treatment planning, has been an essential addition to the practice.

**Dexis digital X-ray sensors.** We chose Dexis sensors to aid in complete integration with our Dentrax practice management software. Of course, image quality and patient comfort with “softer” edges were also a consideration.



leading them through the waiting room. It also lacked space for our team members to take breaks, eat lunch, or meet for regular staff meetings or group training/CE.

The combination of both office spaces created redundancies in some areas while other important office areas were not present. For example, there were seven bathrooms, two wet labs and a nonfunctional front desk—but no staff room or private consultation area. Our private office resembled a

dark closet, with no windows, and didn't provide any relief from the day-to-day stresses of practice.

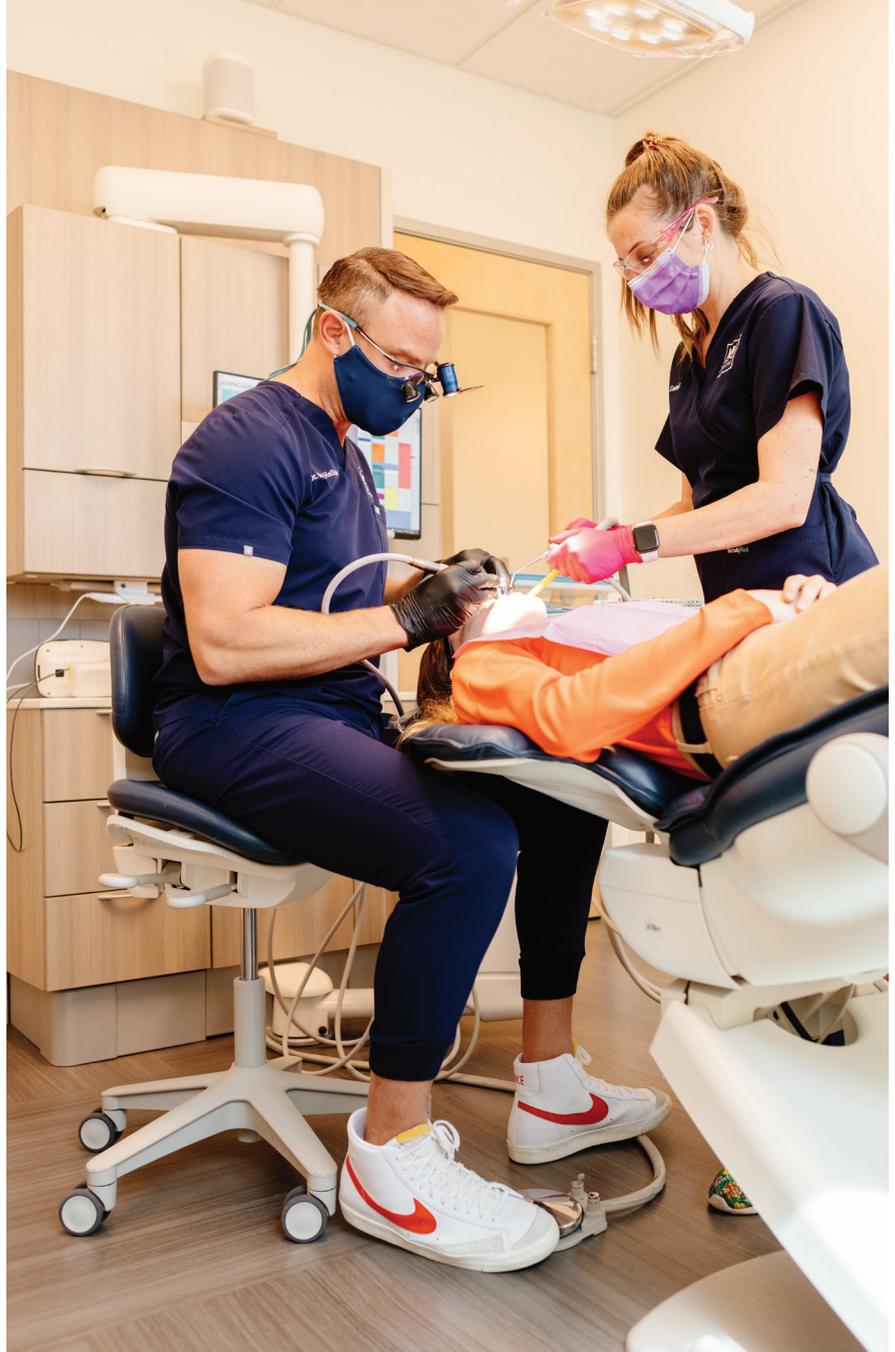
The office was on a busy street but the landlords wouldn't allow signage and the overall business complex was aging. When a roof leak damaged several operatories, we knew it was time for a change. Overall, we didn't feel like the exterior or interior appearance was indicative of the level of dental care we were providing.

**A lot of thought and planning went into your current office. The result was phenomenal, winning a design award from the ADA. What kind of planning and preparation was involved even before you started to build?**

**SM:** The process started in Fall 2017, when we explored the process of remodeling our previous office. We quickly realized it would be impossible to renovate our existing space, because it would require us to practically close our practice for six to nine months. We decided to look for alternate properties to lease or purchase so we could build a new office while still providing care to our existing patient base. I contacted an old friend who specializes in commercial real estate.

The initial conversations about office remodel and design was discussed with our Henry Schein representative, Jaime Phifer. She helped lead us down a path to get our project started, which included conversations and detailed meetings with the Henry Schein Design Studio Team, and a weekend lecture series by Dr. James Tholen on the principles of dental office design.

Once we felt comfortable moving forward, we interviewed several general contractors in the Portland area who specialize in commercial-medical construction. Luckily, the general contractor we selected (Mark Enger of Norwest Construction) put us into contact with a wonderful design/architect team at Guggenheim Architecture and Design Studio. Once we had our “dream team” assembled, we got to work on the interior and exterior designs.



**Tell us about Beaverton and how its revitalization paired up with the new practice.**

**BH:** The city of Beaverton has done a fantastic job of bringing new life into its “old town” corridor. It introduced a grant program that incentivized businesses to remodel their current spaces, and helped new businesses relocate or start up in the downtown area. This occurred right as we were looking for a new location. We were blessed to have the opportunity to buy our new building and build our dream practice with the help and support of the city. Since we moved in, new restaurants, businesses

and a center for performing arts have come to the neighborhood. We feel like we’re part of awesome progress within the community.

**What elements or aspects of the practice are you most proud of?**

**BH:** Our lobby absolutely wows anyone who enters our office, and still makes me smile every time I walk through it. Our architect and design team came to us with an idea to blow out a large section of the main walls and put in a huge sliding pocket glass door that leads out to a patio (which was an old asphalt parking lot). We loved

the idea. Thanks to the inclusion of a stone fireplace, some fine art, beautiful finishes and a retro video game, we have created one of the cooler indoor/outdoor “living rooms,” whether in a home or a dental office.

This space is so welcoming, serene and interesting, it puts our patients in a positive place when they come in to do something that may not be their favorite thing to do. This space has also allowed us to host events, study clubs and our favorite—Botox parties! The open feel to our lobby was especially important to us because it allows our neighbors to walk by and see into our space and say hi.

### How did the pandemic alter or influence this new office?

**BH:** Timing is everything. We moved in four months before being shut down for two months by COVID-19. During those two months, we were able to fine-tune our office and prepare to treat patients in the safest manner possible. Having 12 very private ops—six of which we can completely isolate—we could space patients far apart. And for higher-risk patients, we offered a separate entry and completely isolated and closed operatories. While we could not see as many patients per day, we were proud to have the safest possible environment for our patients, and word quickly spread. We have welcomed hundreds of new patients since the start of the pandemic, most of whom were referrals from existing patients who told us how much they appreciated the spacious, safe office.

### Talk to us about the importance of the “consumer experience” when it comes to your office, and where you feel dentistry is headed as a marketable profession.

**SM:** As I’ve gotten older, I have really enjoyed the consumer experience, which is extremely difficult and a work of art. I don’t enjoy shopping or going to the mall, but I do feel as though a retailer can make you



feel good about your purchase and want to come back again.

I enjoy a nice, clean, organized space that has some creative uniqueness. I think it’s important for the consumer to know someone is passionate about their business and has put a lot of time and effort into providing the absolute best. I want our patients to sit in our lobby thinking, “Wow, these guys really have their act together. If they care this much about the quality of their office, they must care about the quality of the care they’re about to provide.” We’ve always wanted our office to reflect that.

### Now that you’ve been through the process from start to finish, what advice can you share for doctors looking to start a scratch practice or remodel their current location?

**BH:** One, start the process now. It takes a lot of time, but just getting started makes it so you’re that much closer to your dream practice. There were multiple course corrections throughout our process, but ultimately we created something special for our patients, staff, community and ourselves.



Two, take time forming your team. We had a fantastic team—affectionately named “Team Genius”—of Henry Schein, Adec, Norwest and Guggenheim. It was a collaborative and invigorating experience where friends were made and everyone could be proud of the final result.

**When it comes to running the business side of the practice, how are responsibilities delegated? How do you two manage to manage?**

**SM:** It’s nice to have two of us to delegate the numerous tasks that running a small business requires. Because of his experience in corporate medical device sales, Ben is great at staff management and development, as well as operational organization. He also takes charge of marketing and the long-term direction of the office. Everything is a collaborative effort, but management and operational execution are his specialties.

I organize our books, balance our financials, run payroll and manage most HR/compliance issues. Of course, we are always here to pick up the slack whenever the other needs relief. This is a huge advantage to group practice. Our collaboration and fun ideas are what have made our office what it is today.

**What’s the most commented-upon aspect of your office?**

**BH:** Our patients always seem to comment on these three:

**The overall feel and interior/exterior design of the office.** We were lucky to have a very talented design team at Guggenheim—along with Sam’s wife, Liza—to help us design our dream practice.

The Sonos speaker system. Patients are always raving about “Mattson Hellickson Radio,” which is an eclectic mix of music organized into a custom Spotify playlist. Think of the ultimate greatest hits soundtrack from every era and every genre!

**Cerec digital dentistry.** [*Editor’s note: For more on this, see Top Products box.*]

**What product or service could you not imagine practicing without now that you’ve had it?**

**BH:** Dentsply Sirona Primescan, Prime-mill and Speedfire. Total game changers in efficiency while maintaining the highest quality of care.

**SM:** Agreed. Same-day dentistry is the future of dentistry, and the quality of the restorations is incredible. If you are not at least taking digital impressions, you’re making a huge mistake.

**Tell us about your staff.**

**SM:** We love our staff and consider them like family. Some employees have worked in our office for more than 25 years! We currently employ three hygienists, three front office treatment coordinators, four dental assistants and an associate dentist.

**Let’s get into the clinical side of things. What kind of cases do you enjoy the most? Do you have a favorite patient story?**

**BH:** I love implant dentistry. The digital technology we have makes the planning, surgical and restorative aspects seamless. The most exciting days are when we get to create new teeth for people. A close second is cosmetic dentistry cases in which we get to create a dream smile for someone. Watching someone fully smile with their whole face for the first time in years, and knowing the work we did helped them get this confidence back, is very fulfilling.

**SM:** My favorite cases of late have combined clear aligners and minor/major restorative work. There’s something I just love about using minimally invasive techniques to change someone’s smile. This could involve combining clear aligners with the bonding of peg laterals, or simple ortho



and replacing a single PFM crown. The big cases are always fun, but improving someone's smile via clear aligners is always enjoyable for me.

**Every year, you hold a summit to scope out the coming years. Where do you want the practice to be in five years? What changes are coming?**

**BH:** We are about to have our annual Mattson Hellickson Dental Summit—this year at the Bandon Dunes Golf Resort—and it's going to be really fun because it will now include our new associate, Dr. Kyahn Daraee. Our vision for the next five years would be to have Kyahn's practice grow to the point where he can become a partner. We also want to offer as much comprehensive dentistry as possible. We built a second lobby to have an endodontic specialist see patients in their own private space and grow their practice, and the implementation of finding the right endodontist would be another five-year goal.

**SM:** I also think the development of Kyahn's practice is our No. 1 priority. Otherwise, continuing to grow our practice so we can provide additional services for our patients and reward our hard-working staff is always an important goal for us.

**What's the most controversial opinion about dentistry you're willing to share?**

**BH:** I don't believe there is anything harmful with amalgam, and I do believe people who have retained their wisdom teeth are much wiser!

**Give us a snapshot of your life outside the practice.**

**SM:** You could sum up my life outside of the office with two interests: family and sports. I am lucky to be married to my soulmate and the best friend a guy could ever have, as well as to be blessed with three wonderful daughters.

When I'm not spending time with my family driving to and from the kids' activities,

I try to seize the opportunity to play a round of golf or watch sports (Trailblazers, Beavers). I also recently ran my first half-marathon and completed my first triathlon. Training for these activities usually occurs early in the morning before the sun rises, but has been a huge stress reliever for me over the past several years.

**BH:** I love spending time with my wife, Jennifer, and our 6-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter. As a family, we love everything about the outdoors and physical activity, and I have never met a sport I don't like participating in or watching, but my favorites include football and baseball. A great day for me, if I'm not with my family, is spending time with longtime friends at the golf course and waiting for Augusta to call me for that last Masters' entry.

Now that the practice is running smoothly and my kids are getting older, I look forward to traveling to interesting destinations in the world with my family and introducing my kids to different cultures and ways of life. ■