

Catalyst Profile
Gary Grindstaff

For the past 34 years, Gary Grindstaff, who graduated from WCU in 1976, has not strived for fame. Working out of his dental practice at 1433 N. Main St. in Marion, North Carolina, he humbly argues that three decades of doing root canals and letting patients in on grim wisdom tooth-related news has not allowed for many salient “academic or career achievements.”

Though, there were a few times when he was voted McDowell County’s “Best Dentist.”

“That’s just because I’m popular with the little old ladies who voted,” said Grindstaff, cracking a smile. “Still, though public acknowledgment is nice, it certainly is not a priority for me.”

Before sinking his teeth into dentistry, Grindstaff studied biology and chemistry in Catamount Country. Though his “memory has somewhat faded,” since the mid-70s, he still recalls his four year career with the Catamounts baseball team where he had a fielding percentage of .981 and was a co-captain his senior year.

In the classroom, this North Carolina native fended for himself, choosing to depend only on his wits when it came to educational plans. Though initially a pre-dentistry major, he quickly changed to a less specific program. Despite advice from some faculty and staff, Grindstaff wanted to have an alternative avenue if dental school did not work out.

“First, don’t let someone else, like an advisor, make decisions when it comes to your life,” he said. “Secondly, have a back-up plan. I’ve talked with many young people who said they wanted to be a dentist or physician and then they never even finished an undergraduate degree.”

Thankfully, after making the dean’s list and taking numerous courses that coincided with “D.D.S.” program requirements, Grindstaff was admitted to the UNC School of Dentistry. Right away, however, he grappled with basic science courses.

“I was not the smartest student in my classes,” he admitted. “I struggled, but determination and a lot of late nights got me through.”

In 1981, he opened his general dentistry practice in Marion, NC. He and his wife, former Donna Wall, also a WCU graduate, began a family of three children. This is now my 35th year of practicing dentistry.

“Success and happiness means different things to different people. I’ve strived to be the best husband, father, now grandfather, boss, and caring dentist I can be,” he said.