

Dentist Christine Tierney reaches out to help others
Mentors women and students, volunteers at free dental clinic

By Ken Valenti

GREENWICH — Before dentist Christine Tierney went to college, the highest level of education anyone in her family had reached was the associate degree in dairy farming her father held.

Her mother, a phone operator, wanted her children to go further.

“She told us, in utero I think, that we had to go to college for something marketable,” Tierney, 59, said recently

from her Cos Cob office.

Tierney planned on being a teacher. But in high school, she was an assistant for a Manchester dentist, Gil Boisooney. Later, she became a hygienist for another dentist in Manchester and was told she should take the next step.

“My patients used to say, ‘You should be a dentist.’ ” she said. “It wasn’t even on my radar.”

Maybe they appreciated the fact she was a good listener, or the time she took to explain procedures to them using layman’s terms — talking about a patient’s “gums” rather than “gingiva,” for instance.

“Even to this day, I don’t use snazzy terms because I think it’s unfair,” she said.

“We are recognized now by other states for the quality of our continuing education.”

Christine Tierney, dentist



Tyler Sizemore / Hearst Connecticut Media

Christine Tierney, D.M.D., in an examination room at her office, Beautiful Dentistry, in the Cos Cob section of Greenwich.

Tierney has been promoting a scholarship fund for others who are the first in their families to earn degrees.

The advice came from enough patients that she decided to take it. She changed direction at her studies at the University of Rhode Island, opting for more rigorous classes.

“I dropped all of my fun courses and did my prerequisites,” she said.

After the University of Rhode Island, she attended the University of Connecticut’s School of Dental Medicine, graduating in 1986. She opened her office in Cos Cob in April 1991, and has been there ever since.

The percentage of women in dentistry has been climbing, according to the American Association of Women Dentists. In 2015, almost half the students in dental school — 49 percent — were women, AAWD spokeswoman Dr. Elizabeth D. Ramos said. That was up from 42 percent in 2001. The proportion of practicing dentists who were women grew even more rapidly, to 29 percent last year from 16 percent in 2001, she said.

Established in a career she had not envisioned for herself, Tierney turned her attention toward helping others to reach high, and hang on to hard-won successes.

About 10 years ago, she started a mentorship group for woman dentists called Women of Wisdom, who met regularly for advice and support, with challenges from what to do with a practice while on maternity leave to how to handle dental hygienists who treat women bosses differently from men. About 10 to 15 members regularly attended the meetings in area restaurants, but some meetings had as many as 20 or 30 members, she said.

“When one got sick or had a baby, we would really rally around and help,” she said.

The group still meets occasionally, although now the gatherings are more social in nature.

She also began a fellowship at the University of Connecticut for students who lack the guidance and mentors to make their way in academia. Recently, she recorded a radio spot to promote the UConn Foundation’s scholarship drive.

Outside her practice, Tierney is a member of the Connecticut State Dental Association’s Council on Continuing Education, which provides professional education and advancement to keep the state’s dentists informed on technological



Tyler Sizemore / Hearst Connecticut Media
Christine Tierney at her office, Beautiful Dentistry, in the Cos Cob section of Greenwich on Thursday.



advancement, and to give them the training needed to renew their licenses.

“We are recognized now by other states for the quality of our continuing education,” she said. The speakers they get and courses they choose, she said, help assure the state’s dentists continue to improve.

“They’re going to be better dentists and the patients are going to have better care,” she said.

Additionally, she is a volunteer for Mission of Mercy, an annual two-day free clinic for those who need care and can’t afford it. In a two-day clinic last year in Danbury, 278 volunteer dentists performed almost 14,700 procedures on 2,500 patients, Tierney said.

“We did \$2 million worth of dentistry,” she said. “It was unbelievable.”

Greenwich resident Susan Bevan has been going to Tierney for her dental care for about 20 years, bringing her three children there as well. She sticks with Tierney, she said, partly because “She will use everything she has to make the experience as comfortable as possible.”

When she’s not filling cavities or fixing a new crown on a patient’s tooth, Tierney tends to the bees she and her husband, John Igneri, keep. She’s an amateur soprano singer, and she sometimes sings to patients — younger ones, or those she knows well. She sometimes gets caught carrying a tune around a patient who is wearing headphones, but confesses later to having heard her.

With her care for patients, she engenders loyalty in her staff.

“I’ve worked with other dentists,” said dental hygienist Nicole Hotchkin, “and she’s on another level.”