

SMALL BUSINESS

FastStart: Combining techniques creates niche practice

By TOM ADAMS
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William Ferris sold pharmaceuticals and medical devices for 10 years, primarily with Johnson & Johnson Inc. in Albany and Rochester, before he became a "little disillusioned" with the health care industry.

The 37-year-old found that there were other approaches to health care. So Ferris, a Cleveland native, headed off to the Chiropractic College of New York in Seneca Falls. He graduated last April and, with fellow CCNY student Robert Luckey, 27, opened Victor Advanced Chiropractic at 311 W. Main St. in Victor, Ontario County.

"Not that there's not a place for medicinal drugs," Ferris says. "We're not that extreme. Some drugs will save your life in a crisis or a trauma.

"We want to show people there is a better approach to maintaining your health. It starts with maintaining your nervous system."

Ferris became interested in chiropractic after visiting a chiropractor for back pain.

"I had a lot of the same stigmas that chiropractors still fight today, but he did a lot of good things for me," he says. "It was a big paradigm shift that a person could just put their hands on me and make me feel better naturally. After conversations with him, and going to him for a while, I decided to make a career change."

Victor Advanced Chiropractic opened its doors Oct. 11, 2005. It has treated 250 clients in its first six months, Ferris says.

Ferris and Luckey co-own the business. Their five-member staff includes director of rehabilitation Scott Mills, a certified athletic trainer formerly at Houghton College who has a master's degree in physiology, contract-based massage therapist Lynn Mazzeo and office assistant Stacey Jackson.

Victor Advanced Chiropractic is the only office in the state with certification in both chiropractic biophysics and active release technique, Ferris and Luckey say.

"Bill and I met in chiropractic college and wanted to create a

model that was unique to the area," says Luckey, a Binghamton native who lived for 13 years in Ottawa and worked for a chiropractic clinic there. "We wanted to do something that nobody else was doing."

He adds that while in college, the duo knew the business would focus on two areas: to alleviate immediate pain and functional problems like carpal tunnel syndrome or knee pain.

"At the same time, we wanted to also have an appropriate technique for structural correction that we were the experts in," Luckey says. "We put some different techniques together that really fit those needs. I think we've created a really neat niche in this area."

Chiropractic biophysics involves identifying if the skeletal structure of the spine is what it should be, Ferris explains. X-rays are taken at the office and compared with a three-dimensional picture to show possible subluxation, also known as the misalignment of the spine. The research shows what treatment is needed to fix it.

Active release technique is "the Ph.D. of massage," Ferris says.

The treatment is used on muscles that are shortened, tightened, fibrotic or have lesions in them. The muscle problems could be the result of trauma, overuse or repetitive strain typically seen from extended use of computer keyboards.

"In our opinion, we have the best technique for the skeletal structure, and we married it to the best soft-tissue technique," Ferris says. "Now you truly have here comprehensive muscular/skeletal care."

Ferris declines to disclose the practice's revenues but says business is good, and he plans to add at least three people to the five-person staff over the next 18 months.

Clients come seeking relief from back pain, headaches, sciatica, numbness and tingling in the hands, and carpal tunnel syndrome.

"But a lot of people are just interested in wellness," Ferris says. "Some people come through the doors with no symptoms whatsoever but want care for their spine because they understand that that creates wellness."

The office also treats children with symptoms related to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Ferris believes chiropractic treatment extends beyond "just managing pain." He wants to reach out to the community to make people aware of the benefits of chiropractic treatment.

"We have 5 percent of the world's population, but we take 75 percent of the world's drugs," Ferris says. "We're overmedicated. We offer a natural alternative approach."

"What we need to do now is start doing talks on health care to

pretty much anybody who will listen-Kiwanis or whoever-just to get the message of chiropractic out there, that people have another option for pain."

(Fast Start is a biweekly feature focusing on young entrepreneurs.)