

DESTINED FOR DENTISTRY

Shane Simpson remembers as a small child catching glimpses of the dental procedure he was undergoing through the reflection of his dentist's magnifying glasses. He was fascinated by—not fearful of—his childhood dentist and was intrigued by the white plastic molar that sat on the nearby office desk. “It drew me in faster than a toy at a toy store,” he said.

“Those early years instilled in me the desire to become a dentist. I knew it would be a challenge to make this dream a reality. I would be paving my own path,” said Shane.

It's been a circuitous route for the now 31-year-old, with several bumps in the road and some detours along the way, but Shane is finally achieving his lifelong career goal of becoming a dentist. The 2009 Dental Assisting graduate was accepted into dental school, and in July he and his wife departed for Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee.

Shane says he nervously stared at the e-mail from Meharry for several seconds before opening it and reading, “Dear Future Meharry Student.” It's what he has been dreaming of for as far back as he can remember.

But Shane didn't start out dedicated to his education – he admits he was apathetic about academics as a teen.

Since the age of 16, he worked a variety of jobs ranging from a cook in a fast food restaurant, small gas engine repairman, and construction worker/and later supervisor.

The first-generation college student entered community college in Florida after he graduated from high school and moved out on his own. It worked in the beginning, but eventually he became overwhelmed by working full time, mounting bills—and life. “I struggled with working full time and attending college and ended up dropping out of school,” he said.

For three years he worked for a construction company putting in underground utilities. He was making a good wage and was promoted to supervisor for a site development company. “I was successful and I had a lifelong future with the company, but I wasn't satisfied. It wasn't enough. It wasn't my dream,” he said.

“After years of working 50-plus-hour weeks, I devised a plan to get myself into the field of dentistry—no matter the sacrifice,” he said.

He and his wife had the opportunity to move to Anderson so they bought a house, he worked at a family restaurant, and began to search for a community college with a dental program. He found Tri-County. At 23, he entered the program with some trepidation and a reduced confidence level. “I doubted myself, but instructors Donna Palmer and Betty Morgan were so supportive,” he said.

“The instructors work hard at encouraging every student to do their best. They were so supportive of my needs in both the classroom and in the workplace,” said Shane. “The overall atmosphere of compassion for students was critical to my success as a student while I was pursuing my Dental Assisting degree,” he said.



“Shane graduated in 2009, received the “Best All-Around Student” award and passed the Dental Assisting National Boards.

After graduation, his first full-time Certified Dental Assistant (C.D.A.) job was for a large practice where he gained valuable experience working in sedation dentistry. He decided to go back to Tri-County to take prerequisite classes in the evening so he could transfer to Clemson where he graduated in 2014 with a B.S. in Biological Sciences.

This past year Shane became a Tri-County adjunct faculty member, teaching one lecture and two labs in Oral Health Education. “I've enjoyed being part of a dedicated teaching team motivating new students and watching them grow,” he said.

“Throughout my life when times have been challenging, I considered giving up. I could have chosen the easier path. However, my perseverance and passion for dentistry have been like beacons in the night, pointing me to my goal, no matter the storms of life. I realize I needed these pathways to help me grow as an individual. I needed to start here at Tri-County. That's why I've done well as a Certified Dental Assistant.

“I want to be the dentist who provides patients and the community with the best dental care, coupled with a high level of integrity. I will give back to my dental community and my local community. I will demonstrate these deep-rooted qualities and anticipate the day when the white plastic molar toy in my office will inspire another young soul to pursue his dreams and never give up.”