

Thinking Outside the Clinical Box— Facility Offers Fitness, Wellness, and Social Space

■ By Miki Fairley

Even in a profession noted for dedicated practitioners and quality facilities, Prosthetic & Orthotic Associates of Central Florida (POA), Orlando, and its owner and president, Stan Patterson, CP, stand out. In a tight economy where many healthcare providers are cutting back, Patterson keeps expanding with a business model that focuses on going beyond fitting and prosthetic rehabilitation. Plus, he is noted for treating uninsured patients while operating a large patient care facility in which both patients and staff are treated like family, says Karen Hughes, POA's web and social media director, who also has a transfemoral amputation and is a POA patient.

"In my 40 years of being an amputee, I have never encountered a prosthetic facility anything like this," she says. "Working here has enriched my life in ways that are immeasurable—I feel very blessed to be part of an organization that has helped so many people.... Stan has a simple, humble philosophy: he just does what's right! He hasn't expanded the business for personal wealth, but [rather] because he wants to be able to help more people."

Patterson's history of invention and his dedication to professionalism in the O&P industry have not gone unnoticed by his colleagues either. He was recognized with a 2007 American

Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists (the Academy) Award for Clinical Commitment.

New Facility Helps Address Patient Needs

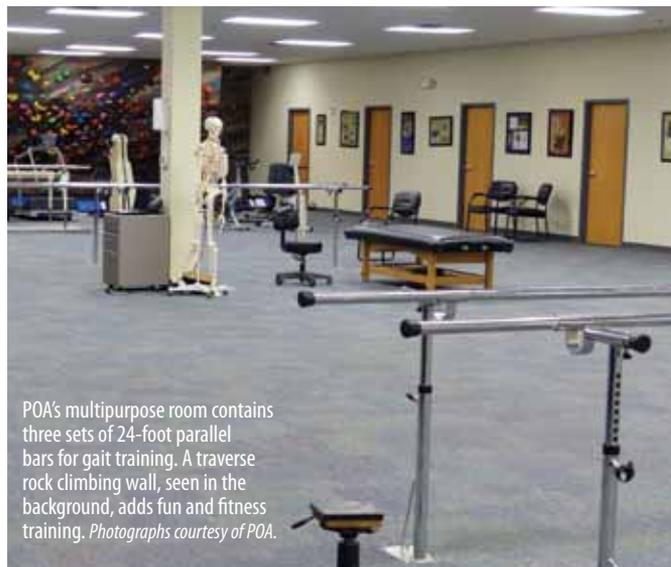
Last March, POA accomplished another milestone as it opened the doors to its new 22,000-square-foot facility that includes a 5,700-square-foot gait training area, a café-style coffee and lounge area, a fabrication area, and a silicone liner fabrication laboratory. Nine additional O&P practitioners, as well as physical therapists, technicians, and others make up the 23-person staff. Rounding out the team are two "canine counselors"—Patterson's border collies, Simba and Sarabi—whose presence cheer and enliven patients. POA tries to create an enjoyable atmosphere for both patients and employees, Patterson says.

"We encourage our patients to talk and share with each other," Hughes says. "Although we have five dedicated patient rooms, they are rarely occupied as most choose to congregate in the 7,000-square-foot multipurpose room, which contains three sets of 24-foot parallel bars and plenty of room to move about and interact with one another."

Another boon for clients is the massage therapy treatment area where Shelly Diez, LMT, a transtibial amputee and long-time POA patient, offers massages to patients and their families at reduced rates. Diez has a master's degree in engineering and is conducting research on how the musculoskeletal system of individuals who have undergone an amputation adapts during the prosthetic fitting process, as well as how massage therapy and other "body work" can alleviate the stress and strains related to living with an amputation and wearing a prosthesis.

With an eye toward a "whole body approach," the facility also offers a fully equipped sports and wellness fitness center, a 2,000-square-foot golf training center, and a traverse rock climbing wall.

continued on page 58



POA's multipurpose room contains three sets of 24-foot parallel bars for gait training. A traverse rock climbing wall, seen in the background, adds fun and fitness training. Photographs courtesy of POA.

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