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BY STACEY RIORDAN / SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Old Greenwich resident John Schinto says he receives at least 50 calls a year that aren't for him. Coincidence? Not exactly.

At 94, Schinto is the oldest of three generations of dentists — all named John Schinto. Needless to say, it causes some confusion for patients who need to make an appointment with "Dr. John Schinto," but the trio has learned to manage this.

Back in 1930, John Sr. opened his dental practice in Connecticut after spending a year practicing dentistry in the New York school system. In 1970, his son, John Jr., now 58, joined the practice. In 1975, John Sr. retired from the practice at the age of 70. He has spent the years since then dividing his time between his homes in Old Greenwich and St. Petersburg, Fla.

In 1984, John Jr. moved the practice from its original location at 45 E. Putnam Ave. to its current location at 19 Riverside Ave., across from St. Catherine of Siena Church, where he said there is better parking and no stairs.

Then three years ago, John Jr.'s son, John III, 30, joined the practice, reuniting father and son in one office as John Sr. and John Jr. had done years before.

According to John Sr., working together has enabled the family to stay close. But things can get a little confusing at times when patients call the practice wanting to speak with John Schinto, according to John Schinto III. When calling after hours, a message instructs patients to page "young John" in case of an emergency.

"I've earned some interesting nicknames," John III said. "I remember when Senator Mike Morano called one time. He had been a patient from way back with my grandfather. He called and said, 'I don't want the father. I don't want the son. I want the holy ghost.'"

While all three generations of Schintos enjoy their practice, none of them knew until college that they wanted to be dentists. John Sr. grew up in Greenwich before studying pre-med at Cornell University. While at Cornell, he decided, instead, to go into dentistry. He then went on to Harvard dental school, where he graduated in June 1929 — four months shy of the October 29 stock market crash.

Like his father, John Jr. also grew up in Greenwich. But unlike his dad, he went to Boston University, where he said he didn't discover that he wanted to be a dentist until his junior year. He went on to complete his dental studies at New York University, but he did not join his father's practice until he completed two years in the U.S. Air Force.

John III can remember the exact moment he decided to go into dentistry. Having left Greenwich in 1984 to study at Avon Old Farms boarding school, he went on to the University of Richmond, where he entered business school.

Like his dad, his moment of realization came during his junior year of college. When discussing future career goals with a former girlfriend, he said he realized that he wanted to go into dentistry. He then returned to Greenwich, where he spent the summer taking chemistry classes at the University of Connecticut. He later went on to

3 generations of dentists in town

What's in a name? A mouthful for this family

the Medical College of Virginia (MCV), where he graduated in 1995.

According to John Sr., both his son and grandson went into dentistry by choice.

"I desired it in thoughts," John Sr. said, "but I didn't push."

Although the family shares a common bond in dentistry, they do have their differences. John III said the hardest thing he ever did was to take chemistry classes at the University of Connecticut when he first decided to go into dentistry.

"We were doing one chapter a day," John III said. "It was the hardest thing I ever did."

John Sr., on the other hand, is the exact opposite.

"I love chemistry," he said.

And the dental tradition in the Shinto family extends beyond the three Shintos. John Jr. said his daughter and niece are dental hygienists. As if that weren't enough, John III's father-in-law happens to be — that's right — a dentist, who practices in Portsmouth, Va.

In September, John III and his wife, an insurance broker in New York City, are expecting their first child.

"I'm hoping to continue the cycle," he said. "It's really a generational practice. In addition to us, many of our patients are in their third and fourth generations. We get a lot of referrals that way. It's nicer that way. We talk, too. It's not just doctors jumping from one room to another."

Beyond the third and fourth generation patients, John III said his patients also consist of people who interact with on a regular basis in town, including his plumber and landscaper.

John Jr. and John III have been practicing together for the last three years. According to John III, his father-in-law wanted him to join the practice in Virginia.

"He had three daughters, none of whom are dentists," John III said. "He wanted me to go there because Virginia's the best. It's not as good as this, though. I can't leave home if I'm in too deep."

In the meantime, John Sr. would like to see his son and grandson enlarge their names in the photo book — if anything, to eliminate confusion.