

LOCAL FOLKS



Azi Yavari with her family, Penny, Ario, Niek and Avis, at La Giralda in Sevilla, Spain.

DR. AZI YAVARI

BY MARY WANSEER

Azi Yavari is the doctor behind the healthy teeth and happy smiles at Hendricks Dental Studio, a practice she bought from a retiring dentist in 2016.

"I love my job!" she said, and she's been at it for nearly 20 years.

An immigrant from Iran, Yavari came to Jacksonville at age eight and stayed until college. She grew up here and is an alumna of Stanton College Preparatory School, back when it used to serve seventh through 12th graders. There, she ran track and played piano.

"If you have time to do this, you have time to study," her parents would tell her.

And study she did. Soon after graduation, she met Ario Rezaei online in 1995 while he was in California, and she was in Gainesville at the University of Florida (UF). Soon after meeting in person, when she was 18 years old, they married, but she did not take his last name.

Yavari moved to California to be with her new husband and to attend the University of California, Los Angeles before working on her Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from the University of Michigan. In 2004, she graduated with honors and began her journey in private practice.

The couple is now looking forward to their 27th wedding anniversary. When the time had come to settle down and raise a family, Yavari told her husband, "I want to find a city that has a public school system like

Stanton. I love that school, and I want that for our kids."

A job in radiology opened for Dr. Rezaei in Jacksonville, so they moved here in 2010. Today, his



Niek and Avis, launching for First Coast Rowing Club.

medical group rotates through the Ascension St. Vincent's system.

To Yavari's pride and delight, all three of her children have been students at her Jacksonville alma mater. Her eldest has already graduated and is now a

junior at UF, another of her mom's schools, studying astrophysics and botany.

Yavari's middle child is currently a senior, and her youngest is a sophomore, both at Stanton and both members of First Coast Rowing Club. They race for the same team but in different boats, separated by gender. The team rows off the Arlington River, close to Pottsborg Creek.

To compete, they travel to a variety of cities for state, regional and national championships. Yavari is quite invested in her children's sports program, and most of her free time is spent being a supportive parent.

"That's our fulltime, afterschool activity. It's what they do, so it's what I do," she said.

Visiting extended family in Colorado and California, touring national parks and traveling abroad are also important activities to them.

When not tending to patients' mouths or spending time with family, Yavari loves reading. She doesn't say no to any genre, as long as it grabs her attention within the first couple of chapters.

"In general, I read fiction because it's a nice getaway. My favorite book of all time is a piece of historical fiction called 'The Pillars of the Earth' by Ken Follett," she said.

Next on Yavari's reading list is "Killers of the Flower Moon" by David Grann, which she wants to complete prior to seeing the film adaptation that was recently released.

"If I find a book I love, I'm happy!" she said.

Lying in bed at night while the house is quiet is her preferred place to read. If not there, then sitting on a bench near the duck pond when the weather allows. She doesn't read at coffee shops, like others do, because she's too busy people-watching there. She considers it quite fun, imagining what their lives might be like.

"Not like stalkery, not creepy," she said.

Yavari likes walking down to the river and back home again, too. While walking, she particularly enjoys exploring the new restaurants that are popping up around the San Marco area. It pleases her that so many of her patients live in the neighborhood and that she sees them on walks as well.

There have been times when patients have seen Yavari at Publix, wearing something other than scrubs, and they think it's weird.

"They're taken aback that I'm out shopping," she said.

Yavari sees Jacksonville as massive land-wise, and yet, she feels it's the smallest big town because she's a maximum of two people removed from anyone else in the city. She's comforted by that sense of community.

"I love Jacksonville," Yavari said. "There are connections everywhere!"

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