

Hello *Thornleigh, Westleigh & Pennant Hills*
Neighbours

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Say hello to the team at the
**Dentist @
Westleigh**

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Living the Dream



Say hello to the team at the **Dentist @ Westleigh**

by Megan English

It's a long way from Manila to mountain biking in Westleigh, but that's where life's twists and turns have taken Dr Aldrin Villanueva Bautista, his wife Irene Silva-Bautista and their young family.

Like many who come to Australia to start a new life, twelve years ago Aldrin left an established career and business in the Philippines – as well as a large extended family – for the opportunities offered here in Sydney.

But the road to work professionally in Australia with overseas qualifications is not simple – it takes a dedicated person to requalify in their chosen field, undertaking a higher degree for the second time in a new environment with little support or connections.

And yet, the experience is something Aldrin is grateful for. Much had changed in dentistry in the 10-15 years since he had originally graduated, and retraining allowed him to benefit from not just the advances in technology and diagnostics since then, but also the changes in patient care.

'The patient is very involved in the treatment plan and understands why we are recommending a certain approach and how to maintain it at home. We are here to help our patients,' says Aldrin.

Although it is apparent that putting his patients at ease is something Aldrin does naturally. Softly spoken and with a

calm nature, he brings his own childhood experiences to the surgery.

'As a child in the Philippines, I was the youngest of six. My mother had to go back to work to support the family, so I was given a lot of freedom by the nanny who indulged my sweet tooth. As a result, I regularly found myself in the dentist's chair as a teenager. Many people have had a traumatic experience at the dentist, much like I did. I don't want people to feel like that; I want them to receive the care they need,' he says.

It is this ability to empathise with his patients – and allay their fears – that has made Dentist @ Westleigh grow predominantly through word-of-mouth. 'I treat each patient as if they were one of my relatives. I give my utmost to each patient, as if they were my child, my brother, my aunt or my grandfather,' he says sincerely.

A place like home

Indeed, walking into the surgery is like walking into the front room of a friend's house. There is a brightly coloured lounge, magazines (and toys for the



kids) as well as scented candles and flowers.

Aldrin's wife Irene, a qualified dentist in the Philippines who is yet to retrain in Australia, says they had a very specific idea in mind when establishing the practice.

‘We wanted to provide our patients with a warm, inviting atmosphere while delivering the highest quality dental service.’

As practice manager, you will most likely see Irene's friendly face at the front desk when you arrive for your appointment, but Rebecca, Alicia, Lizzie and Lolly also help out at reception in the treatment rooms as dental assistants.

‘We are a team,’ says Aldrin proudly of his wife and the young women he has trained and who are concurrently studying for future careers in law, finance and engineering.

All paths lead to Westleigh

So how did Aldrin come to set up practice in Westleigh? ‘It's a funny story, and lucky really,’ he starts. ‘My doctor was encouraging me to take up some exercise to balance the intensity of running my own business and to improve my health. Associate dentists Nikki and Leah work regularly now,



but at the time I was working six days a week.

‘Biking was something I had always enjoyed – roaming the streets of Manila as a child – and I wanted to take it up again. I had heard of the trails in Westleigh, which were a bit of a local secret before the council bought the land and opened them officially,’ Aldrin explains.

‘Anyway, I would come out early on a Sunday morning to ride. One day Irene asked me to pick up some groceries on my way home. And that's how I found Westleigh Village. The Aldi had just opened, and the centre had been refurbished. It was the perfect place to set up a quality, family-owned and operated dental surgery close to home.

The practice was just an empty shell at the time; we had to completely fit out the space. We were very clear we wanted to build somewhere from

scratch that would fulfil our vision of a family dentist where people would feel comfortable.’

There are plans to expand the surgery to accommodate another room and full-time dentist, but for now, Aldrin is dedicating himself to his patients, growing the business, and providing the kind of care he is known for.

A dream come true

So how have Aldrin, Irene and their children Chloe (12), Chelsea (10) and Charles (5) settled in to the local community? ‘We have been here for nearly three years now. In that time, the community has been very supportive. It is amazing how warmly they have embraced and accepted us; it is something we are very grateful for.

‘We have people of all ages come in – from 18 months to 102 – and people often pop their head in the door just



to say hello as they go past. It is really lovely,’ he says.

‘Having migrated from the Philippines, the Westleigh locals have made our adjustment easier. We are very happy to have the chance to continue what we started back home – building our own dental practice in Australia was very important to us.’

And do they miss Manila? ‘Yes, being without family support and the regular dinners with extended family is very hard, although thankfully I do have a brother here. There are many other benefits to living in a city like Manila, but it's very competitive too,’ says Aldrin.

‘Being here has made me a better person. I am more independent. And the opportunities available to my children are so much greater. Sometimes I find it hard to believe that we are here, we have built a business and are part of the community. It is like a dream come true.’

And then there are the local mountain biking trails, which fortuitously drew the

family here to begin with. Aldrin often rides with friends and his kids.

‘You just feel so free; all you can hear is the birds. It's great to burn off some energy and switch off. It gives me time to just be.’

It may be a long way from Manila, but for this young family rebuilding their dream, Australia really is the lucky country.

Serving all ages in our community, the Dentist @ Westleigh is your family's partner for a healthier and brighter



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