

A Real Ironman

John Potter knows what's scarier than grueling triathlon workouts: awful gums

From 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., five days a week, 37-year-old John Potter works his fine motor skills to the bone, so to speak.

As a periodontist in his self-started, six-year-old dental practice, he prevents and treats gum disease so that his patients can enjoy their teeth a little while longer. His day is full of appointments for consultations, observations and treatments in either of his Allentown or Kutztown offices, and the schedule and profession are downright stressful. Potter also works one day a month at Sacred Heart Hospital as a volunteer teacher.

About 100 general dentists in the area refer his patients. "Patients come to me because they either have bad genes or bad [dental hygiene] compliance," he says. "We do nonsurgical and surgical treatments, and we do deeper cleaning than you'd get at your regular dentist. We do implant dentistry as well, when people lose their teeth due to gum disease."

Potter admits that what he does is not very pleasant, but he and his staff do a lot to take the edge off for their patients. Every day, fresh chocolate chip cookies are made in a special cookie oven in his office, and those who wait it can have a free warm paraffin wax treatment to moisturize their hands.

Gross Gums to Gross-Motor Skills

Outside his dental practice, Potter is a husband and father of two children, and he also spends a lot of time working out his gross-motor skills so he can compete in Ironman and other multiple-sport competitions.

Ironman is a grueling triathlon started 25 years ago by a Naval commander to settle a debate about which athlete is the most fit. The result was an event that combines swimming, running, and cycling. Competitors must swim 2.4 miles in a lake or ocean, ride a bike for 112 miles, and then run 26.2 miles [the length of a marathon].

In order to compete in the triathlon championship event held in Hawaii in October, athletes must qualify in one of 27 regional events all over the world. Potter qualified in Lake Placid, N.Y., last year and was one of only 1,649 to compete in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, on Oct. 18. He finished in the middle of the pack.

To qualify for competitions, Potter and fellow triathletes have to train all year long.

"In the offseason, like now [early December], I get up about 5 a.m. and work out for almost two hours," Potter says. "I help my wife get the kids up, then I'm off to the office until about 5. After the kids are in bed, I work out again for a couple of hours, doing a different set of exercises or a different sport from what I did that morning."

Only 112 more miles by bike and 26.2 more miles by foot left. John Potter, shown finishing the swimming leg of a triathlon held in Hawaii.

