





# 2020's HOTTEST

**Up-and-coming:** She is excited about the future possibilities.

**The Educator:** He is committed to professionalism.

**The Strategic Partner:** He is enthusiastic about helping people.

**Second Generation:** He is building the next chapter.

**The Couple:** They are working hand-in-hand.

**Find out why these individuals are the hottest of 2020.**



— ASSOCIATION OF —  
ORTHODONTIC  
LABORATORY  
PROFESSIONALS

# The Educator

**C**hristopher Gajewski has been in the industry for over 30 years. His uncle owned one of the first small orthodontic dental labs in the Washington, D.C. metro area. He took to it naturally at a young age and after getting his degree in Journalism from the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Fla., he returned to the lab. His uncle's lab worked with some of the top orthodontists who treated the political elite, exposing Gajewski to the best doctors in the DC area. He decided to move to the Philadelphia area in 2003 and bought a lab in 2005.

"It was a different culture back in the early 2000s, with more professionalism," said Gajewski. "We would get an occasional case from a GP but they were few and far between. Everything changed with technology. After Align came out with Invisalign, I remember ortho lab owners looking at each other and thinking, the technology was patenting processes that we had already been doing for years. I personally thought it was an interesting tool but the doctors and educators allowed the tool to become a solution. The basics of orthodontics did not change, but the doctors did."

The use of aligner technology has quickly grown within orthodontics, general dentists, and availability to the general public. While the use of invisible trays may be popular, Gajewski has seen a massive increase in relapse cases and is concerned about how the general public perceives this treatment and the notion that clear aligners are a more affordable option.

"Hawleys are the bread and butter of orthodontic labs but there is a reason why they have been the standard of post-treatment care for over 100 years," he said. "A well-made Hawley will last 15+ years. Invisible retainers need to be replaced much more frequently because they will start to stretch and allow for movement, potentially leading to relapse. Patients need to be informed of post-treatment care and the cost accrued over time."

He is also hopeful that people will start to understand the long-term value of being treated by an orthodontist versus saving money and trying to do it themselves.

"I have friends and family ask me all the time to fix something, even my own daughter, and my response is to go see a doctor," he said. "I make aligners



## Christopher Gajewski

Owner Bryn Mawr Orthodontic Laboratory, Exton, Pa.  
Founder/President Association of Orthodontic Laboratory Professionals (AOLP)

### *What excites you about what you do?*

The thing that excites me is adapting to the paradigm shift in the industry and helping others do the same.

### *What industry change would you make if you could?*

The industry change I would make is simple: injecting some professionalism back into the profession. In my article, "DIY Orthodontics: The Dental Industry's Frankenstein Monster" (<https://assocolp.org/diy-orthodontics-the-dental-industrys-frankenstein-monster>), I write about how digital technology and new materials has in some part facilitated a race to the bottom in some product categories. Case in point, a tool, aligner therapy, was allowed to become a solution.

### *If you could have dinner with three industry peers who would it be?*

The head of the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO), the head of the NADL and the head of the American Dental Association.

### *Where do you want to be in ten years?*

I would like to be retired in ten more years, or an undistinguished professor at a foreign university. I also want to get more involved with the AOLP, education, and the future of orthodontics. I would most like to leave the industry and profession better than what it was.



### *What do you think is the biggest opportunity as the profession moves into the future?*

As the profession moves into the future, I am not quite sure if what I think would be considered "opportunity." I see the future offering a test of character and ethical obligations to an uninformed public. Orthodontic dental laboratory technicians in many respects have the knowledge and experience to assist our orthodontic clients in the best patient outcomes. We all need to use that skill and knowledge to benefit the patient.



**"There is such a need to further educate doctors, lab technicians, and the public about orthodontics."**

for doctors but I have been in this long enough to know and understand what I do know and what I do not know, and what I believe is that orthodontics should be done by an orthodontist."

While he understands the financial appeal ortho cases have to a GP, in his experience, a GP is not going to see things the same way as a trained orthodontist. An orthodontist has additional years of specialized training to recognize difficult cases, and what appears to be a simple case can turn into a complicated case very quickly. In response to what he was witnessing, Gajewski decided to take action. He launched the Association of Orthodontic Laboratory Professionals (AOLP).

He said, "I saw where things were headed with technology and all of the possibilities and I saw not only doctors but sales reps and vendors that simply did not know what goes on in an ortho lab. Vendors are trying to supply a need by providing technology but without understanding what we have to do with it. I was invited to speak at the Dental Laboratory Association of Texas conference because they wanted to introduce more orthodontics. I gave my lecture and it hit me that there is such a need to further educate doctors, lab technicians, and the public about orthodontics. I finally took money out of my own pocket, hired a lawyer, formed the association and said 'here we are.'"



Gajewski is still getting the word out about the AOLP to doctors, laboratory owners and educators. He was recently approached by a few doctors at the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) meeting and they discussed a potential synergy between lab owners, educators, doctors and vendors to help reverse the downward trend in professionalism. The former head of the Italian Orthodontic Lab Association even reached out to him and wanted to attend the AOLP meeting in March. While the AOLP now has a board of directors, Gajewski still struggles with the amount of time and direction the association requires in addition to running his lab. His ideal vision for the future of the organization is to get more people, companies and educators involved.

He said, "We have approximately 70 members, and the Facebook group is more active with 763 members to date. People need more education and we have not done enough to reach out. I would encourage readers to join the AOLP. It is not about the cash. The bigger organizations need to take us more seriously and we need to show them a strong membership. Our conference is coming up at the end of March 2020 and it has been doubling in size every year since we began. Ortho lab owners may call ourselves the unwanted step-children of the dental industry. I, however, would like more awareness and the return of professionalism to the profession and this is a way to accomplish that."



AOLP board members