living well

Wellness comes in all forms. That's why Kent State University at Stark strives to foster holistic wellness in each student — wellness of body, mind and spirit — and to provide students with a high-impact experience that will empower them for success on campus and beyond.
Victims of domestic violence and other types of abuse are often beaten up physically and beaten down emotionally… if I can help them feel better about themselves, that triggers a bigger psychological improvement than I see with an average patient who comes in to get rid of some wrinkles.

— Dr. Joe Niamtu III, cosmetic facial surgeon and Stark Campus Distinguished Alumnus
Joe Niamtu III, D.M.D., always loved science. In high school, he read medical books for fun. As a teen, with help from his father, Niamtu befriended some Canton-area surgeons, who invited him to observe them at work. He still remembers watching his first surgery.

“There was a little girl who had been riding in a wagon,” says Niamtu. “She had gone down a hill into a car, fracturing her face and suffering lacerations. I was mesmerized by her surgery — the anesthesia and how the surgeons basically took her face apart and put it back together.”

Niamtu was hooked and began volunteering as a surgical assistant on weekends. After graduating from high school in 1969, there was no question about what he wanted to do with his life.

His first step was attending Kent State University at Stark.

“My father had done the same, beginning college at Kent State Stark when classes were taught at McKinley High School and graduating from the Kent Campus,” says Niamtu, a Stark Campus Distinguished Alumnus. “I wanted to save money for my future education and Kent State Stark was a brand new facility just down the street. It was a matter of economics and convenience.”

After earning his bachelor’s degree at Kent State and a dental degree from Case Western Reserve University, Niamtu completed a general practice residency at Carolinas Medical Center. He then finished his medical and surgical training in a four-year hospital residency in oral and maxillofacial surgery at the Medical College of Virginia. Today, he is an internationally recognized cosmetic facial surgeon in Richmond, Va., and one of the most featured authors in cosmetic surgery publications. He lectures all over the world and appears regularly in newspaper articles, television broadcasts and popular magazines. He has served on the board of directors of the Cosmetic Surgery Foundation and chaired numerous committees of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery.

About 98 percent of Niamtu’s practice involves facelifts, brow lifts, cheek implants, lip fillers and other elective procedures to help patients look younger and boost their self-esteem. But more eye-opening are the patients who make up the remaining two percent — the people not there by choice.

HELPING PATIENTS FOR FREE

“Victims of domestic violence and other types of abuse are often beaten up physically and beaten down emotionally,” says Niamtu. “Their self-esteem is destroyed. If I can help them feel better about themselves, that triggers a bigger psychological improvement than I see with an average patient who comes in to get rid of some wrinkles.”

Just ask the young mother who was shot in the head by her abusive husband. Or the girl whose face was burned when a mentally ill neighbor threw sulfuric acid on her. Or the high school student who was struck in the face with an ax during an altercation at a tractor supply store.

For these and dozens of other patients in serious need, Niamtu reconstructs facial deformities and reduces scarring, free of charge.

At first, Niamtu connected with these patients through newspaper reporters who had written about them and their traumatic events. Then, charities started calling. Soon, children from developing countries were being flown to Virginia for Niamtu’s care.

“I will always treat any child or disabled person for free,” says Niamtu. “There is no greater feeling in the world than to help someone who has become disenfranchised by life — someone who has nowhere to go and no one to help them.”

Patients with facial deformities and those who have suffered trauma or abuse are usually withdrawn, he says. Typically, they don’t like to make eye contact. But as treatment progresses, Niamtu sees them blossom and begin living happier.

GIVING IS GRATIFYING

Giving — especially to children and young adults in need — has become standard practice for Niamtu over his 30-plus-year career. He also enjoys giving to his alma maters, including Kent State Stark.

“Kent State is entwined in my life,” says Niamtu. “My father graduated from there. My sister, Lisa Waite, is an associate lecturer of communication studies at Kent State Stark. Both of her sons, my nephews, as well as a litany of cousins and friends, attended or graduated from Kent State.”

And Kent State Stark was just what Niamtu needed to spring into advanced education and a successful career.

“Success is when you go to bed on Sunday night and are really excited to go to work on Monday,” he says. “I love what I do. It’s gratifying to help people look and feel better.”