

Dermatologist steps into Punta Gorda

By **RUSTY PRAY**
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Anais Aurora Badia's first step into medical practice was a big one. Her next three were simply logical.

Badia, a pediatric and adult dermatologist, in May opened an office in Punta Gorda. The new practice, at 329 E. Olympia Ave., is the fourth in the logical progression of workplaces that began in 2001 with a hit-the-ground-running opening of Florida Skin Center in Fort Myers.

"I was still a second-year resident in dermatology when I started getting ready to go into private practice," she said. "At the end of my second year, while I was still in training, I decided I wanted to open a practice. I advertised in the local Yellow Pages, got a local number and, literally, when I started I already had 13 patients scheduled my first day. I graduated and opened my practice. I never worked for anyone."

Three more offices followed in steady progression: Cape Coral, Lehigh, and now Punta Gorda. All of the openings, she said, have been patient-driven.

Her practice recently was named to Florida Trend magazine's 10th annual list of best small companies for the second straight year. In 2017, Badia was named a Distinguished entrepreneur of Southwest Florida by Florida Gulf Coast University.

"It's wonderful to build something from nothing," she said in a press release



SUN PHOTO BY RUSTY PRAY

Dr. Anais Aurora Badia joins Dr. Chetan Vedvyas in front of Florida Skin Center in Punta Gorda. Badia opened the practice in Punta Gorda in May.

announcing the award. "It proves you can do whatever you would like, as long as you are willing to put the effort in."

Badia bought the Punta Gorda office about a year ago. It is two stories, 7,000 square feet, and her mother, who has the same name, took charge of all the renovations. She's an architect. She designed the first office in Fort Myers from the ground up.

Ambiance sets Badia's offices apart from other medical facilities. According to a press release, the practice in Punta Gorda features six specially-designed Mohs surgical suites that

provide comfort and amenities to patients. Each surgical guest suite includes a gourmet coffee and tea bar, juice, water, and other beverages, plus hot snack items from a microwave oven. Patients can also enjoy music and a high-definition television in their suite, where they remain for the entire visit.

"A lot of our focus on patient care is really to make sure the patient — what we call guests — is comfortable," Badia said. "They're coming in, obviously, for a medical service. We want to make sure they're comfortable. So, we make it an inviting environment, not such a sterile environment where it's almost like drudgery to go to the doctor's."

Badia is the daughter of parents who fled Castro's Cuba in 1964. She grew up in Dover, Del. She went to the University of Miami, received her training in dermatology at Albany Medical Center in New York and trained in pediatrics at Miami Children's Hospital. She is a resident of Fort Myers and the mother of 15-year-old twins, a boy and a girl.

She was drawn to dermatology while training in pediatrics at Miami Children's.

"I had the opportunity to do a

rotation in pediatric dermatology, and it just was an instant interest," she said. "I liked the visual aspect of it. I liked the fact that you could help patients pretty quickly. You could see results in their treatment in one or two weeks for the most part, maybe sooner.

"I just really enjoy helping people. I really do. I just love it. I think my favorite thing to do is when there's a challenging case, when a patient has been having a really tough time of it, that we see results and they feel so much better. It's very gratifying."

Harvard-trained Chetan Vedvyas came from Houston Methodist to join the Punta Gorda practice as its director of Mohs surgery and dermatologic oncology. Mohs is microscopically controlled surgery used to treat common types of skin cancer. He didn't know Badia personally.

"What I knew of her before joining this group was, it's a practice with quite exceptional credentials," he said. "Sometimes, when you move to different parts of the country, you don't quite know what you're going to get. But I was really quite happy to discover that someone of Dr. Badia's caliber was here."

Then, he laughed. "She's also sort of known as one of the experts in keeping young people looking young in our community. That makes her a pretty popular person around town."



PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Anais Aurora Badia