

The Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic

Long after the sun has set on May Day, when all the volunteer dentists have gone home, and the chairs and lights and equipment have been packed up and trucked away, the Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic (PRDC) will still be there to continue the "circle of goodness."

Jack and Margaret Thompson are deeply involved with this fledgling local free dental care facility. Already, they are seeing patients, mostly for extractions, three evenings per month through the Orange County Free Clinic.

They point to the overworked and underpaid health department dentist who is making do with barebones equipment in cramped office space. "His mission is to treat underserved populations, but you put one dentist in a five or six-county area, and he has to drive from one place to the next to see patients. He just can't serve the population that we see as being needy. So, our idea is to establish a clinic where we can see the underserved."

Dr. Thompson also points out that the health department dentist sees "almost 95 percent children through Medicaid. Our goal is to see some Medicaid patients who aren't being seen, but also underserved adults." And that's one of the reasons they will not be treating children at the Barboursville M.O.M.; because it's their parents who have slipped through the health care safety net, not their kids.

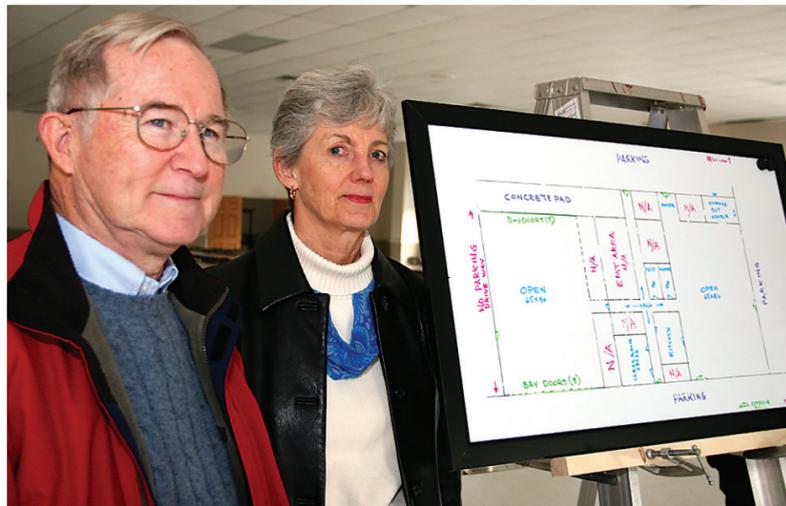


PHOTO BY PHIL AUDIBERT

When the May Day M.O.M. is over, the Thompsons hope the Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic, based in Orange, will provide follow up and continue to provide free and local dental care to those in need in a seven-county area.

Actually that Medicaid safety net is developing yawning gaps itself. "The health department is just inundated with requests, but as Medicaid gets cut back, if the money's not there, you're not going to have dentists or ancillary personnel to treat the population. So we see this (the PRDC) as a means of getting to the population that are not getting service at all," continues Thompson. "Eventually we want to have a free standing dental clinic with multiple chairs, just like any other dental office."

Actually, the May Day M.O.M. in Barboursville is the PRDC's maiden voyage. "We're targeting Orange, Louisa, Greene, Madison, Culpeper, Fauquier and Rappahannock, and probably a few will get the word in Charlottesville-Albemarle," says Dr. Thompson of the one-day event. And although this area is fairly prosperous compared to the Eastern Shore or Southwest Virginia, organizers feel that the local project will tap a heretofore hidden population of people in need.

Andre and Mary Hintermann of Eheart have played a vital role behind the scenes with the M.O.M. and the establishment of the PRDC in Orange. They point out that the poverty level locally varies between 5 and 9 percent. "I'm afraid that in 2009 and 2010, we are a bit higher," says Hintermann. "These lost jobs are people who are one or two or three paychecks away from poverty level. The needs increase and the funding decreases." He estimates 220,000 people live in the seven counties that this May Day M.O.M. and the PRDC hopes to serve. "If only 5 percent of them are not getting dental care, that's a flood of people," chimes in Jack

Thompson.

It is interesting to note that, with all this talk about universal health care, not one penny in taxpayer money will go towards the cost of this one-time event. Nor will the government be involved in the 100 percent privately funded PRDC. Yet it is here, in Barboursville and Orange, and not the halls of Congress or the corridors of the White House, that the rubber meets the road when it comes to truly helping people in need. This is about as far as you can get from a national health care plan!

And in the health insurance world, dental care, like eye care, is the red-headed step child. It is estimated that 100 million Americans have no dental coverage. "It's obvious with health care cutbacks and lack of insurance that's available for a great part of the population, that when it comes to dental care for a great number of the population, it's just not available," says Dr. Thompson. "And we see this as a way to give back and to treat those populations that are not getting proper dental care."

Thompson points out, "So much of general health is impacted by the inability to chew your food, digest your food properly. And if you're missing half or all of your teeth; if you don't have some kind of replacement; your body suffers. And we see that a lot." In his 40 years as a dentist in Gordonsville, Thompson has seen how good dental hygiene practices are passed from one generation to the next. He has also seen how bad habits are passed down the same way.

Andre Hintermann confirms "for quite a few people, if you have a tooth problem, you just pull the tooth. And so the children find it absolutely normal that by age 30 you don't have any more teeth." Oftentimes, these people are pulling teeth themselves at home in unsanitary conditions.

The PRDC hopes to combat this culture by being there long after the M.O.M has packed up and left town.



PHOTO COURTESY THE VIRGINIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

At the Barboursville M.O.M., patients will be screened to determine if they need fillings, extractions, a simple cleaning, or a combination of the three. Organizers expect as many as 700 people to show up at the Barboursville Firehouse May 1.

"The circle of goodness"



PHOTO BY PHIL AUDIBERT

The Barboursville Firehouse will host a free dental clinic May 1. Event organizers, (from left to right) Randy Williams of the BVFD and longtime Gordonsville dentist, Dr. Jack Thompson consult with logistics specialist, Bill Hall and Executive Director, Terry Dickinson of the Virginia Dental Association.

When the day dawns, Saturday, May 1, the Barboursville Firehouse will be thronged by people caught up in a "circle of goodness," where good deeds foster better ones, where givers become receivers.

It may be a brilliant May Day morning that will turn hot by noon. It may be cold and pouring buckets. No matter. These folks will wait all day if need be. Some have been here since the night before.

Their speech mirrors their diversity: from the drawl of Appalachia to the triplet staccato of rapidly spoken Spanish. Although of various ages and ethnic backgrounds, they all share one thing: a desperate need for dental care.

Many will be suffering from broken and rotten teeth. Others will have no teeth at all. For some, this may be the first time they have ever seen a dentist. One or two

may be suffering from "meth mouth."

It won't matter. They will all be treated. And it won't cost them a thing because for this one day and this one day only, the Barboursville Firehouse will be transformed into a massive free dental clinic, known as a Mission of Mercy, or M.O.M.

"Anybody who's willing to stand in line for as long as it takes to see us, we will treat them," says executive director of the Virginia Dental Association, Terry Dickinson. "We ask

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I choose to donate by:

CHECK CREDIT CARD

Please make checks payable to:
Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic
PO Box 152
Barboursville, VA 22923

You may also donate online at:
www.vaprdc.org



DONOR INFORMATION

Name: _____

Billing Address: _____

Phone: _____ (circle one: day or evening)

Please keep my donation anonymous.

CREDIT CARD INFORMATION (if applicable)

Visa or MC #: _____

Exp. date: _____

for no identification; we ask no questions about if they have the proper finances. We don't question them. All we say is, 'if you're willing to come and stand in line for four or five hours to get treated, we will see you, and we'll treat you, no questions asked.'"

Dickinson then looks downward. A troubled expression flits across his face. "At some point we're going to have to walk out to that line of people who have been waiting and say 'I'm sorry, we're not going



PHOTO COURTESY THE VIRGINIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION
A youngster grabs a quick nap as his caregiver receives treatment during a Mission of Mercy in Wise County last year. Although the local M.O.M. will not be treating children, it will provide some daycare while adults are treated.

to be able to see you.' That's probably the hardest job that we have is to tell somebody 'you've been waiting in this line,' and I'm going to tell you 'we can't see you; we simply have reached our capacity.'"

Dickinson is saying this as he scopes out the sprawling community room at the Barboursville Volunteer Fire Department. He pores over a floor

plan with his logistics guy, Bill Hall. "We like to look at the facility, walk around, get a feel for it and think about how it's going to look once we set it up," he says. "But we're pretty flexible too. Once we set our chairs that we actually do the dentistry in, we have that option of modifying how patient flow goes, where do we put supplies, where we put sterilization, X-Ray and stuff like that."

Try to imagine this circle of goodness: 45 dental chairs set up in this space, each staffed by a volunteer dentist and assistant. As many as 175 dental care professionals from all over the state give their time and expertise. They and 200 additional local volunteers scurry about directing patients, delivering X-Rays, sterilizing instruments. Drills whine. High intensity lights glare. Cables snake across the floor.

Other folks staff a daycare center as parents are treated. The kitchen is going full bore on donated food and help. In the fire engine bays, volunteers help with patient registration and examination, conducting a kind of dental triage. Outside, people are parking cars in the hayfield out back.

"We've just got a team of people that have worked together for 10 years, and we all kind of think alike, see the same pictures, work well together," continues Dickinson. "Nobody has got an ego, and that's what you've got to do when you're going to be a servant; you leave your ego and your agenda somewhere else. You're here simply to serve."

Going over the floor plan, Dickinson is satisfied with what he sees. Longtime Gordonsville dentist, Dr. Jack Thompson and his wife-assistant, Margaret breathe a sigh of relief. Although they have participated as volunteers at the Eastern Shore M.O.M. for six years now, this is the first Mission of Mercy project that has ever been hosted in this area. They're not quite sure what to expect. "We're assuming that there's going to be between 500 and 700 patients that will show up here," says Thompson, "and most of them will be treated."

And although they cannot perform complicated procedures that require lab support such as crowns, bridges or implants; a comprehensive range of dental care will be offered. Dental students from VCU "will be doing anesthesia on the patients, getting



PHOTO COURTESY THE VIRGINIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION
Taken during a break at the Eastern Shore M.O.M. in 2008, this photo of Dr. Roger Wood of Richmond with his assistants proves that the "circle of goodness," goes both ways for volunteers.

them numb," says Thompson. "They bring their second, third and fourth-year students, their residents and various dental specialties come; endodontists who do some root canals. So it's not going to be just drillin' and fillin'. If the opportunity arises for these residents to do something a little different, they'll do it." The VCU dental school will even bring a mobile oral surgery unit for more complicated procedures.

M.O.M. projects in Virginia have been going on for the past 10 years, serving some 34,000 people. The most famous is the annual Wise County event that treats 1,500 patients from 12 different states during a two-day period every July.

A few years ago, Terry Dickinson of the VDA witnessed a mini miracle in Wise. He tells a story of a man in his mid 50s. "He had come to us, and we had much difficulty in understanding what he was asking us because he had such a terrible cleft in the palate of his mouth that you couldn't understand what he was saying. But it was obvious what he needed... Here was this guy who had this terrible cleft palate, and he's growing up as a little kid, nobody could understand him. So they made fun of him. He finally dropped out of school at third grade. He never learned to read or write. So where did he end up?

Working in the coal mines; that's the only place he could get a job, that speaking wasn't really significant."

Correcting a cleft palate with a bridge was far beyond the scope of the Wise County Mission of Mercy. So, Dickinson arranged for this fellow to see a specialist who, although he was not a volunteer at the M.O.M., agreed to do it, albeit reluctantly. The next year, the specialist shows up as a volunteer and so does his patient. "And now this guy says to the doctor, 'you have changed my life.' He said, 'you make me feel like a man again,' because he can speak and you can understand him. He's got teeth so he can eat better. So it changed his whole life."

But the important thing is it also changed the life of the doctor. "It turned him into a volunteer," exults Dickinson. "Today he runs the whole prosthetic part for us at Wise... So he was kind of a reluctant volunteer, but once he did it, heard the guy's story, it impacted him so much to hear what this guy had gone through in his life."

Dickinson smiles and adds, "So it's like this circle of goodness that occurs out of a simple little act." And that's what they hope to see at the May Day M.O.M. in Barboursville.

The May Day M.O.M. in Barboursville

If you're looking for dental care at the May Day M.O.M. in Barboursville, show up a day early, because starting at 2 p.m. Friday April 30, volunteers will pre-register patients for treatment the next day.

A team from Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Dentistry will take X-Rays and screen patients to determine if they need fillings, extractions, a simple cleaning, or any combination of the three. "And as a part of that, we're going to do glucose screening; we're going to do blood pressure; just general health information, before we actually treat them," says Dr. Jack Thompson.

No other questions will be asked; nothing about income level, existing health insurance; you don't even have to prove citizenship. And you will not be charged any fees. The only restriction is that children will not be treated; you have to be at least 18 years old to be seen by a dentist.

After pre-registration, you will be asked to return the next day, May 1, bright and early for treatment. The clinic gets underway promptly at 7 a.m. Lines will start forming by 6; even earlier. Those who cannot register until that same day, will have to take a place in line behind the ones who did. You cannot make an appointment, and you can't request a time slot. You have to wait in line for both registration and treatment. It is first come, first serve.

But your chances of being seen by a dentist increase if you pre-register on Friday and show up early Saturday morning. By midday May Day, they'll look at the line and estimate how many

more they can treat before they have to shut down. "And if we can only see 200 more and there are 300 out there, it's pretty hard to tell them they can't be seen," says Dr. Thompson.

When it's your turn, you will be given a local anesthetic, if needed, and sent to the appropriate dentist for



PHOTO COURTESY THE VIRGINIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION
A volunteer examines a patient during the screening process at the Wise County M.O.M. in 2005. Patients are not required to have identification, health insurance or proof of citizenship to be treated.

cleaning, fillings and/or extraction. If you've got kids with you, they will provide daycare while you are being treated. Lunch will be available on site.

When your procedure is finished, you'll be given a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, and dental hygiene infor-

mation. Dr. Thompson continues, "That's one of our goals, is part of the hygiene screening, to try to get them on a better brushing regimen, better meals, how to take care of themselves better, give up smoking, give up sugary snacks, diet control type things."

Patients will also be given "a sheet of instructions that will have our free clinic number on it. And my anticipation is that I'll be available the week following the M.O.M. project to cover any emergencies, dry sockets, any kind of complications that come because of this," says Dr. Thompson. And that's where the Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic comes in.

Although the M.O.M. is staffed by as many as 350 volunteers, it still costs money...\$40,000 in equipment rental, medications and supplies for just that one day. Organizers hope to raise those funds through an Adopt-A-Dentist program.

It costs even more to run a free dental clinic. Donations for both the M.O.M. and the PRDC can be made either online to www.vaprdc.org or by mail to:
*Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic
Mission of Mercy Project
PO Box 152
Barboursville, VA 22923
(540) 661-0008*

Adopt-A-Dentist Pledge Drive

Yes, I want to support the PRDC and Mission of Mercy project by adopting a dentist! Please accept my pledge for each patient treated on May 1st. I understand the goal of the project is to serve between 500 and 600 patients.

___ \$1.00/patient (~\$550)
___ \$0.75/patient (~\$400)
___ \$0.50/patient (~\$275)
___ \$0.25/patient (~\$140)
___ \$0.10/patient (~\$55)
___ Other (please specify amount pledged per patient treated) \$ _____

Yes, I want to support the PRDC and Mission of Mercy project by contributing the enclosed fixed amount:

___ \$1,000 ___ \$50
___ \$750 ___ \$25
___ \$500 ___ Other (please specify fixed amount below)
___ \$250 ___ \$100
___ \$ _____

Please complete other side →