



Welcome to the Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic

Fall 2009

Six years ago this September, several local churches sponsored a three-day charity medical/dental clinic, using a rented dental van. At the end of three days, everyone seeking help for a medical problem had been helped, but each night, over a hundred people with severe dental problems had to be turned away – often in tears.

From this experience, as well as several follow-up clinics using a rented van, it became evident that the dental crisis in our mountains could not be solved without a permanent free dental clinic, and the wheels were set in motion. With support from their churches, numerous individuals began organizing and fundraising, and volunteers spent countless hours setting up the Clinic. It opened in April 2005 in its current Laurel Terrace location, which at that time was rented with an option to purchase.

The end result is the remarkably successful not-for-profit Blue Ridge Mountains Health Project, better known in these parts as the “Free Dental Clinic”. **The Clinic is run like a regular dental office – except with all volunteer dentists and free care for those who need it and can’t otherwise afford the cost.**

The facilities include three fully equipped operatories, X-Ray facilities, a sterilization area, an office, a reception area, and a supply room.



The equipment is state-of-the-art, the facility is pristine, and the patients are 100% grateful. The facility and all of the equipment are now owned by the Clinic, debt-free.

Since inception, one of the key contributors has been Dr. Tom Smith, a retired dentist from Florida who, in 2005, applied for and received a North Carolina license so that he could voluntarily staff the Clinic on a regular basis. Early on, he obtained donations of much of the basic dental equipment that had to be in place when the Clinic first opened. On average, he is in the clinic two days a week: performing surgery, filling cavities, and offering dental hygiene advice.

Over time, other dentists have joined the effort, particularly Dr. Mel Livernois, also a retiree from Florida, and Dr. Michelle McDonald, who has a private practice in Cashiers. Several other area dentists volunteer less frequently, but nonetheless make a huge contribution. Through the combined efforts of these dentists, Executive Director Karen Minton, Dental Hygienist Nancy Buchanan, and the staff, the Clinic has provided more than 16,000 dental procedures on almost 1,600 patients. Last year alone, the market value of the work performed was \$550,000. But the waiting list continues to exceed 400, with many of those listed as emergencies due to severe pain and infection. **The Clinic’s work literally changes the lives of people who have no other way to get critically needed care.**



Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic

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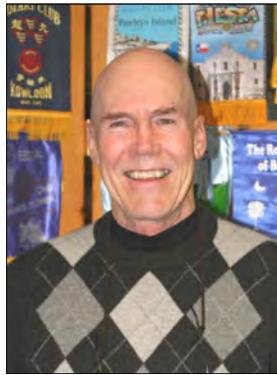
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Dr. Thomas Smith
Dr. Michelle McDonald
Dr. Mel Livernois
Dr. Chris Dyer
Dr. David Silverstein
Dr. David Jones
Dr. W. Craig Ashton



A Word from Our President Ron Keller

The Free Dental Clinic is a unique facility that should make everyone living in western North Carolina proud. It is not duplicated in its range, sophistication, or quality of services by any other free clinic in the State. We are the only resource for needy individuals living west of Asheville who do not qualify for Medicaid. Our innovative zeal has enabled us to create a crown program for our root canal patients, and this unique prosthetics program resulted in a \$10,000 award from the BlueCross BlueShield Foundation of NC in 2008.

The dedication and commitment of our Board, professionals, and staff has generated another year of growth. However, even with volunteer dentists and a debt-free facility, dentistry is expensive. Our 2009 budget exceeds \$180,000, up about 25% from 2008. Despite the difficult economy, our costs for insurance, supplies and equipment, paid staff and staff training, licensing and utilities have all increased, along with our patient load. However, the annual dollar value of services provided still exceeds \$550,000. The key point here is that every dollar donated produces well over \$3 in critically needed dental services.

You have been very generous in the past, and I understand the difficulties of the current economic environment. However, you have seen us leverage your donations to perform over 16,000 procedures on nearly 1,600 patients in just over four years. **The market value of these procedures exceeds \$2.1 million dollars.** Dental disease, disabling pain, infection and disfiguration don't care what the economy is doing. Please understand our story, share our commitment, and open your wallets for our less fortunate mountain neighbors.

Children's Dental Health Project



Volunteers provide dental screenings at local schools.

Begun in 2007, the Children's Dental Health Project is a cooperative effort with the Rotary Club of Cashiers Valley to provide intervention at an early age. Area schoolchildren are provided with free annual screenings, dental awareness days (complete with goodie bags and a visit from the tooth fairy), and weekly fluoride rinses for those who choose to participate.



Executive Director's Message Karen Minton

I work closely with all of our patients, and I know the dollar value of our services is dwarfed by the impact we have on their lives. We see people with disabling levels of pain and infection, or who have withdrawn from public contact because of unsightly mouths. There are people around here who would probably be dead if we had not removed teeth that were the source of massive infections spreading to their hearts and other vital organs. There are other people who no longer use alcohol to deal with the awful pain of rotten teeth. There are also people who smile again – or can now eat normal diets -- **after we've repaired the teeth we could, removed the ones that could not be saved, and provided crowns or dentures.**

We've had a tremendous impact on the lives of so many people: like the 60-something couple who were slowly starving because they could not chew regular food, or the 30-ish mother-to-be whose unborn child was threatened by the infection spreading from her teeth, or the teenage girl who had been painfully sensitive to the appearance of her awful teeth, or the 34-year old woman who finally felt she could seek a better job – and stop being ridiculed by her brothers.

The Clinic is quite deservedly a point of community pride, and I am confident that my team will continue to satisfy our mission of restoring lives, one tooth at a time.



Tooth Fairy Ed with Dr. Michelle McDonald, DDS

Why I Am a Tooth Fairy Ed Morse

When invited to become a tooth fairy, I did not hesitate to accept this honor. I joined the **"Order of Tooth Fairies,"** knowing that joining would provide me with a way of contributing to my community and give me a chance to offer a very important health message to children. I **really had no idea just how busy a tooth fairy's schedule would be!** But I have absolutely no regrets. Working with the schools, the children, the other tooth fairies, and the dentists and staff at the Free Dental Clinic is both rewarding and just plain fun.

Blue Ridge Mountains Health Project, Inc.
P.O. Box 451
Cashiers, NC 29717
(828) 743-3393

**We restore lives,
one tooth at a time.**



www.blueridgefreedentalclinic.org



Mission Statement

The Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic delivers high-quality dental care to people who cannot otherwise afford these critically needed services. Motivated by the beliefs and core values of our contributors and founding churches, we restore lives, one tooth at a time.

The Free Dental Clinic is located upstairs in Laurel Terrace on Highway 64 East, downtown Cashiers, NC. The Clinic can be reached at (828) 743-3393.