

Students get a visit from dental hygienists

BY DANIELLE KUEHNEL
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The front office at Butte Creek Elementary School was all hustle and bustle around noon on Friday. It probably wasn't much out of the ordinary — secretaries coming and going and a constant ebb and flow of children with sores and sprains. There was one exception, though: A team of dental hygienists visited the school to provide free sealants to second- and third-grade students.



Danielle Kuehnel / Appeal Tribune

Children visiting the front office routinely peered into the makeshift dental room — the area that is normally reserved for nurses and first-aid supplies.

Hygienist volunteers Michelle Larson and Deanna Feller use the curing light to seal student Bubba Larson's teeth.

“What are they doing?” asked one student.

“Oh, they're just setting up the torture chamber for naughty kids,” laughed one of the secretaries.

Not quite the answer the student expected, and not quite what the hygienists were setting up.

Volunteer hygienists for the Community Outreach Clinic, Deanna Feller and Michelle Larson, both from Dr. Floor's office in Salem, were instead diligently preparing for their first sealant procedure by setting up a portable dentist's chair, air compressor, curing light and suction tools.

The clinic recently received a \$10,000 grant from the Ronald McDonald House fund, which, according to the clinic's manager Yutonah Bowes, will hopefully keep the program going for another three or four years through aiding in the purchase of tools like the portable dentist's chair and other supplies.

“This is a huge opportunity for our kids,” Bowes said. “It's basically a protection from cavities.”

According to Bowes, many insurance companies do not cover sealants, which can cost up to \$25 per tooth, making the procedure unaffordable to the many low-income families that the clinic serves.

“We seal the sixth-year molars, and most kids get those around second or third grade,” Bowes said. “This is basically the best time for the kids to get sealants.”

Bowes expected Feller and Larson to seal the teeth of approximately 30 students, all who had been screened previously by Dr. Feller, a volunteer dentist for the clinic, to determine the appropriateness of applying sealants.

Butte Creek Elementary is the second of a four-school sealant tour, which began with Monitor, and will continue at Silvercrest and Scotts Mills schools.

“We go around to different schools rather than have the free service out of the clinic,” said Bowes, “because a lot of parents can’t take off work to bring their kids, and if the school provided transportation, kids would just be missing a lot of class time.”

And as hygienists Feller and Larson finally finish their set-up, they both smile and gush with white teeth of their own, “We’re really excited!”