

Tualatin Rotary is Driving Miles for Smiles

By Britta Geisler

Restaurants on wheels—better known as food carts—line downtown Portland's streets and draw thousands of tourists and natives alike rain or shine. But even before our home was dubbed nationally as catering to hungry people via wheels, Tualatin had already taken to the streets...for dental care. With sponsorship from the Tualatin Rotary Club and the Tualatin School House Pantry, Medical Teams International's Mobile Dental Van program has pulled into the community. The program brings free dental care for those in urgent need who cannot afford emergency dental procedures.

"Our whole focus is on service above self, especially on youth and families," said Linda Moholt, Rotary's president elect. Moholt got the mobile dental van program on its feet in 2005 while she was a volunteer at the Tualatin School House Pantry. With support from many community members she was able to bring free dental healthcare to Tualatin's community. Shortly after the dental van's first visit to Tualatin, the Tualatin Rotary Club got involved. Now the dental van can afford regular monthly visits to the community.

A mobile dental van is, well, just as it sounds: It's a mobile dentist office. The vans themselves are dental clinics installed in 38-foot converted motor homes. Each dental van contains two compact dental offices. One chair is located at each end of the van allowing two patients to receive care simultaneously and in private.

Dr. Dale Canfield, a licensed volunteer dentist with Medical Teams International since 1998, is a regular volunteer for the Rotary-sponsored dental van. According to Canfield, the dental van is providing free services that might typically cost up to \$1,800 at a dentist's office. Dr. Canfield said that his philosophy in the program is that, "... you accept people the way they are and do everything you can to help them."

Arlene Hornschuch organizes the Tualatin Rotary-sponsored dental vans where professionals like Dr. Canfield operate. She has volunteered for the past five years. Arlene said, "We can provide visits to 12-14 patients in a morning."

The dental van stops at the Tualatin School House Pantry one to two times a month with one to two licensed dentists onboard. When the dental van visits twice a month, Rotary is able to treat as many as 24 Tualatin community members in need each month. As a result they are capable of providing upwards of \$36,000 of dental care to needy members of the local community.

Recently, Arlene connected a woman in need of dentures with the Rotary-sponsored program. "She was really excited," said Arlene. "But here she was, she just had her teeth pulled, yet she was just thrilled to get the procedure done."

For those without access to health care, a safe and caring trip to the dentist is a blessing. The dental van has been an innovative method to provide free dental care to those with need for emergency dental services. Arlene said many patients come back to say thank you.

Rotary's Mobile Dental Van is literally driving miles for smiles in the Tualatin community. If you would like to learn more about what Rotary does, join us for lunch at the Tualatin Country Club any Wednesday between 11:45am – 1pm or visit our website at tualatinrotary.org.

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