



Providing Happy Smiles For A Lifetime

THE STORY BEHIND SMILE FOR A LIFETIME EAST COUNTY

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The American Dental Association, in general, and dental professionals in particular engage in numerous projects aimed at providing dental care for people who would otherwise not be served. Throughout my career, I made a practice of extending my services at no cost to underserved people, especially children and young people, who came to my attention.

A recent survey reported in *U.S.A. Today* found that 67% of people say they notice a person's smile first. We could hardly overemphasize the dramatic impact we can have on young recipients because a nice smile is one of the most priceless possessions that a child or young person can have. It helps instill a sense of self-confidence that can assist in healthy socialization at school and improve the chances of success when the child graduates and moves into the world.

On the other hand, badly aligned or missing teeth can be socially debilitating or even paralyzing for a young person. Kids can be cruel. Most of us can remember times when we were teased or bullied because of some perceived defect — the way our voice sounded, perhaps, or how we dressed. Imagine how much worse a child's experience in the classroom, on the playground, or in other places where he/she is thrown into the company of other children if there is some obvious, or even truly dreadful, issue with their teeth.

My ability to serve the dental needs of underserved youth in our community rose to a much higher level in 2011, when I started Smile For A Lifetime East County Foundation. We are awarding Orthodontic Scholarships to deserving kids through age 18, who otherwise might not be able to afford

treatment. It is a chapter of the nationwide Smile For A Lifetime Foundation, which has been providing American children and young people with beautiful smiles since 2008.

Our scholarships are awarded at the discretion of a nine-member board of directors composed of community members including dental professionals and former patients. A young candidate for one of our scholarships must go through a qualifying process. The two main criteria are needs — orthodontic first and then financial. These are real scholarships and not handouts. Applicants are required to write essays and answer questions, plus provide transcripts, financial records, and letters of recommendation. The board then reviews each of the applications and refers the finalists to me. Once the scholarships are awarded, I conduct a standard clinical exam, and begin treatments.

Many of the scholarship recipients have not had regular dental care and checkups for a long time — sometimes never. A number of local dental professionals who are general, pediatric, and oral surgeons volunteer to perform services such as extractions and fillings *pro bono*. It is constantly humbling to see my colleagues support this project that is so dear to my own heart.

We conduct two drives a year, awarding an annual total of 12 scholarships, each of which provides the fortunate recipient with comprehensive orthodontic treatment. Each drive ends with a Reveal Day in the spring and fall. These are happy events with balloons and big Publishers Clearing House-size checks. It is gratifying to see the response of the recipients. Some scream with amazement and delight while other



BY DR. ROBERT SHEFFIELD

grin quietly. Of course, that is just the beginning. An even greater moment occurs on the day when they get their braces off and get a good look at the Smile For A Lifetime that is now lighting up their faces. To date we have awarded 49 scholarships; we've seen that happen 49 times.

I'm a third-generation East County resident and deeply committed to improving the quality of life in our region in whatever way I can. Our foundation has the goal of providing for positive change within the larger community as well as in the life of each scholarship recipient. One of their essays requires them to plan for deliberately paying-forward to others the gift that they received from the scholarship. They might volunteer for the Food Drive at their school, volunteer at the local YMCA, or perhaps become the leader of a church youth group.

Teachers and educators who are members of my board have enlisted staff and teachers in local schools to recruit potential candidates for our services. We're constantly trying to disseminate the word more broadly in order to assure that we find candidates who are most in need of our services and worthy of receiving them.

Smile For A Lifetime is a 501(c)(3) tax-free foundation. I offer my services without charge and apply any contributions to helping defray collateral costs, such as printing fees and third party lab bills.

For more information, check www.S4L.org. Scholarship applications may be downloaded from www.sheffieldortho.com.

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