

Volunteers step up to 'Give Kids a Smile'

College provides \$73,000 worth of dental services, free of charge, to local children.

BY KATHY CHANG
Staff Writer

For Hope Holbeck, chairwoman of the dental hygiene program at Middlesex County College, participating in the Give Kids A Smile program is rewarding on many levels.

"The program focuses on children who would otherwise not have access to dental care," she said.

Middlesex County College was among a handful of local public and private locations to participate in the Give Kids A Smile program, which was held all around the country on Feb. 3. In New Jersey, under the direction of the New Jersey Dental Association, the program is made possible through the culmination of the efforts of several organizations. Each February, the public and private sector dental communities come together to ensure the delivery of care to thousands of children who otherwise may not be able to access care.

Holbeck said the college's dental hygiene program has been participating in the program for nine years. She and Catherine Reilly co-chair the effort.

"This program gives active dental care with a public support system," she said. "Sometimes, dental care is inaccessible and

the clinics have long waits."

The program also serves to educate students on dental hygiene.

The college saw approximately 85 children this year, providing an estimated \$73,000 worth of dental work. Some 50 to 60 professionals, including dentists and hygienists from the area, volunteered their time for the program. Holbeck said the college sees an average of 70 to 100 children each year.

"The New Jersey Dental Association reaches out to school nurses in November and they relay the children to us," she said.

Holbeck said the 30 or so students in the college's two-year dental hygiene program participate during the day.

"They fill different roles, whether they are in charge of showing educational videos to the children or taking X-rays," she said.

Some of the students dressed as tooth fairies.

"They help escort the children around and bring them from spot to spot, squelch their tears if needed, just to make the day as fun as possible," said Holbeck. "Some of these students have never visited a dentist before."

Holbeck said the focus of the program is not just on screening the children.

"An examination is included, and cleaning," she said. "The dentists are doing as much as they can do, including some emergency care if needed, such as root canals on baby teeth. The goal is to do as much work at one sitting to prevent anymore dental is-



Shachi Bengali of Edison, a 2007 Middlesex County College graduate, works on Adrian Solopekov of North Brunswick, who is comforted by Capt. Fluoride, otherwise known as Leah Santangelo of Edison, who is in the dental hygiene program at MCC.

sues in the future. Of course, this is not always possible."

Other work included fillings, extractions, fluoride treatments and stainless steel crowns.

Amanda Jucks, of South River, is a dental hygiene student at the college.

"I helped out last year and I feel that this is a great opportunity to provide any care for these children, when otherwise they wouldn't have access due to the economy," she said.

Leah Santangelo of Edison dressed as Captain Fluoride to cheer up some of the children who were scared. One child sat in her lap as his teeth were being checked.

"The day has been great so far," she said. "I'm here to encourage the children."

Dr. Irvin Sherman, who has dental practices in East Brunswick and Avon-by-the-Sea, has volunteered his time since the program started at the college.

"I give the lectures to hygienists at the college," he said, noting that he specializes in pediatric dental care.

Asked why he participates in the program, he said he felt like he needed to give something back.

"This is just a wonderful way and method to give back," he said. "The children are wonderful."

Dr. Joseph Muscatiello, who has had a family dental practice on Plainfield Avenue in Edison for more than 30 years, has volunteered his time in the program for the past eight years.

"It's a great way to give back a little," he said. "I do a lot of charity work at my of-



Taha Nasr (l) of Piscataway practices brushing with the help of Middlesex County College dental student Bijal Jhaveri of Edison.

Some of these kids need legitimate work done, and I don't want to do too much here. It is important that these children do not have a bad experience. If they need additional work done, I give them my card and I have them set an appointment and I'll do the work at my office for free."

Muscatiello said his family practice consists of dental hygienists MaryAnn Wolk and Jane Perrina, who have been with him for a long time. He said he also tries to hire hygienists from the dental hygiene program at MCC.

"I hold the program in high regard," he said. "Hope [Holbeck] is fantastic, and I have a good rapport with the college."

Holbeck said in addition to providing care for the children, she hopes the students in the college's dental hygiene program received lifelong lessons beyond the walls of the classroom.

"We have had former students who are dental hygienists come back and volunteer ... we must be doing something right," she said.