

# Program provides dental services to those in need

By **MARTI ALEXANDER**  
Journal Editor

Fifteen dentists from across the state gathered at the First United Methodist Church on Lindsey Lane Saturday to provide dental care to those in need.

This was the first time that Smiles on Wheels program has been held in Atlanta and the fifth time that the program has ever been held.

During Saturday's event, which served over 100 residents, dentists, dental professionals and volunteers worked together to restore patients' smiles.

"Both adults and children who cannot otherwise afford dental treatment will receive on-the-spot restorative dental care through this program," said Dr. Michael L. Giesler, community dental chair for Atlanta. "These

efforts are made possible by several dental professionals and community volunteers who donate their time and talents to ensure the success of

Smiles on Wheels." Giesler was one of four local dentists participating in the event. Other dentists included Dr. Danny Addington, Dr. Steven Pratt and Dr. James Bartlett.

Dentists also came from as far away as Amarillo and Lubbock to participate.

The Smiles on Wheels is a one- or two-day version of the Texas Dental Association Smiles Foundation multi-day Texas Mission of Mercy and the events are only held in rural areas of the state with extreme need.

Giesler, who is on the Smiles Foundation board, said when the Smiles on Wheels became available he asked the board about

holding it in Atlanta.

When looking for a location to hold the event, Giesler looked to his home church, First United Methodist Church of Atlanta. "I

knew the people and they are always supportive of any missions activity," he said.

After acquiring a location, Giesler sent out a letter inviting local dentists to participate, with Addington, Pratt and Bartlett accepting. "I had excellent cooperation from our local dentists," he said.

This was the first time for Addington, Pratt and Bartlett to take part in the Smiles on Wheels and all three said they would participate again.

Addington, who has been practicing dentistry since 1984, said the event was well-organized. "They did a super job setting up the patients," he said.

Bartlett said this was his first event in this area, but that he has participated in different events in the Houston area. He has been practicing for 37 years, with 24 of those years in Atlanta and said the Smiles on Wheels program is beneficial. "This gives people a chance to take care of some of their dental problems and it's a good way to spend a Saturday," Bartlett said.

Pratt said he enjoyed spending the day helping others and feels that Smiles on Wheels is a very good program. "It's good for us as dentists to be able to help people through programs like this," he said.

Giesler said all the dentists and

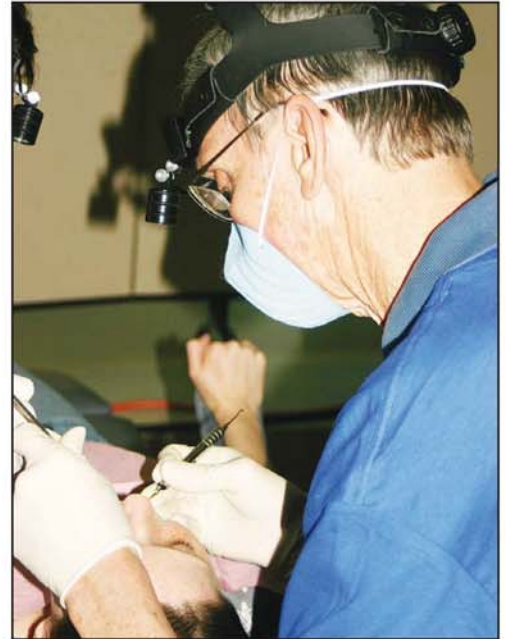


Photo by MARTI ALEXANDER

**Dr. James Bartlett works on a patient's teeth during the Smiles on Wheels event in Atlanta.**



Photo by MARTI ALEXANDER

**Dr. Danny Addington numbs a patient prior to working on his teeth during Smiles on Wheels event.**



Photo by MARTI ALEXANDER

**Dr. Steven Pratt, right, is assisted by Nora Pratt during the Smiles on Wheels event held in Atlanta.**

professionals worked free of charge. "No one was paid for their work," he said. "Many dentists even provided their own instruments and supplies."

Giesler said their goal on Saturday was to gear their dental care toward adults. "A lot of the children have Medicaid available, but sometimes the adults are the ones that fall through the cracks," he said.

On average, over \$600 in care was provided to each patient, with some receiving over \$1,000 in care, all of which was free to the patient.

"Mainly what we were providing patients were fillings, extractions and cleanings," Giesler said. "Our main goal was to try to get the patients out of pain and free of infection."

Prior to his involvement with missions in the state, Giesler said he traveled to Belize, Central America for dental

mission trips.

"I realized as the years went by, we had a lot of need in our own community and state," Giesler said. "I discovered that I didn't have to go out of state for missions."

This was Giesler's second Smiles on Wheels event to participate in and he will participate in more this summer in Waco, South Texas and Mineral Wells. He will also participate in Texas Mission of Mercy events to be held in El Paso and Lubbock in late fall.

Giesler said they are hoping to hold a Texas Mission of Mercy event in Texarkana in 2011.

Helping out at the Smiles on Wheels event were local EMTs, staff members from Horne Enterprises who provided security and local physicians including Dr. Dan Nichols and family nurse practitioner Nita Little who came in to help monitor health concerns.