

# Deserving children in Collier will be all smiles

BY CONNIE DILLON

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CHS Healthcare, in collaboration with the University of Florida College of Dentistry, has received a grant

from Oral Health America for Smiles Across America, a program that will make dental sealants available to all second grade students in five Collier County elementary schools.

In order to effectively administer the school sealant project, CHS needed only to look to its Ronald McDonald Care Mobile program. Since 2004, the Care Mobile has been adapting to the needs of at-risk children in our community, delivering medical and dental services to children where they live, play and attend school. It is the perfect vehicle, literally, to ensure the success of Smiles Across America for participating schools in Collier County.

For those wondering why we want to provide a preventive dental sealant program in Collier schools, let me share some statistics. First, 58 percent (25,451 out of 43,142) of the students in Collier County schools are categorized as “economically needy” and are eligible for free/reduced lunches. This is an important fact, because according to the U.S. Surgeon General report (2000), six of every 10 American children will suffer from tooth decay by the age of 5, and those who are considered economically disadvantaged are twice as likely to suffer from untreated tooth decay. That

report also found that childhood tooth decay results in 51 million missed school hours each year, for an average of 3.1 missed days of school for every 100 students.

Recent studies show sealants to be the most effective procedure in the reduction of caries (tooth decay).

Smiles Across America partners with dental service providers all over the country to fulfill Oral Health America’s key philanthropic goal of improving access to oral health information and providing services for uninsured and underserved children and families. According to its website, Smiles Across America reaches more than 310,000 children annually in school-based or school-linked settings, delivering oral disease prevention and oral health promotion services.

Participation in this program will also help to further CHS Healthcare’s mission, which is to provide quality medical and dental care targeting underserved children and adults in Collier County.

Clinical requirements must be met and parental consent given prior to placement of dental sealants on the children’s permanent teeth. The sealants will be applied by UF dental students and by Dr. Kelley Johnson, CHS dental director, who will also directly supervise the UF students. Dr. Gerard Santiago, pediat-



A young patient is all smiles after his dental appointment in the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile.

COURTESY PHOTO

tee, Mike Davis, Parkside and Pinecrest.

As with all services rendered on the Care Mobile, this program will be conducted at no cost to the parents of the children who participate.

With strong leadership and collaborative relationships, CHS Healthcare continues to find new ways to bring primary and preventative care to our community.

CHS Healthcare and the UF College of Dentistry collaborated to open a pediatric dental practice in 2008 on the Edison State College campus in Naples. With support from the Naples Children & Education Foundation, the practice was established in the NCEF Pediatric Dental Center, a state-of-the-art facility where CHS patients ages birth to 21 years can receive routine and specialty dental services provided by UF faculty and residents.

Support from individuals in the community coupled with partnerships with NCEF, Oral Health America, the UF College of Dentistry and many others allows CHS Healthcare to care for close to 50,000 children and adults in our community. Thank you! ■

ric dentist and CHS volunteer, has also expressed interest in participating.

The program will provide a full range of preventive oral health services, including an oral health examination, education, cleaning and sealants, when appropriate, for approximately 500 children.

The five elementary schools that will participate are: Lake Trafford, Mana-

— Connie Dillon is the executive director of the CHS Healthcare Foundation. For more information, visit [www.collier.org](http://www.collier.org) and [www.chsHealthcareFoundation.org](http://www.chsHealthcareFoundation.org).