

Giving Haitians something to smile about

Mother Theresa said, "I will never understand all the good that a simple smile can accomplish." A smile can light up a life. It is a visible sign of happiness, caring, joy and love.

However what happens when we are unable to smile because of tooth pain? Here in Canada we have access to dentists. The majority of working people have dental insurance which eases financial concerns. For those in Ontario with lower incomes, emergency dental care is available. In Haiti however, none of this is available.

Over six years ago Hamilton's Georgina Cosentino recognized this dental need while visiting Haiti for the first time. The result was the founding of Healthy Smiles for Haiti (HSFH), an organization with a three-fold-vision: to provide toothbrushes and teach preventive dental care and nutrition; to supply equipment and instruments for dental clinics; and to provide funds for essential dental treatment for Haitians with no other ability to pay.

Since HSFH's inception, over 8,000 young and not-so-young have received brushes and instruction. Six clinics have received supplies, with over 3,000 pounds

either shipped or personally brought down by Georgina. "When you visit a school of young beautiful faces who are clean and always well dressed in uniforms, it is such a joy. Then on closer inspection, past the smile, I see child after child with major decay in teeth that should be lasting them a lifetime."

It is for this reason that February of this year saw Jane Winhall, a dental hygienist, join Georgina's journey to provide sealants to help stop cavities from ever starting for little six year olds. Jennifer Dibben, owner of Belasco Dental Studio in Waterdown, also joined Georgina, and provided materials and expertise to make partials for adults who lost teeth through dental disease.

The three local ladies provided their care in Thibeau at "Healthy Smiles Klinik Dantè". The dental centre was completely renovated this past September, thanks to the generosity of Rotary International through a matching grant of \$20,000, sponsored by Burlington North, Mississauga Meadowvale, and the Haitian club in Jacmel.

Reflecting on a recent visit, Georgina noted that, "It was so wonderful to help with the installation of the equipment along with Rotarian Past President Ray Trask. We worked side-by-side with Haitians to create a state of the art dental clinic for the community. While we were working, Dr. Cherley was examining patients in the room beside the clinic."

Through funds raised by Healthy Smiles For Haiti, Dr. Cherley Policier, a Haitian dentist, has been hired to provide care for the community five days each week. "I believe it is so important to support Haitian professionals within Haiti. They



Hamilton's Georgina Cosentino visits one of the dental clinics supported by Healthy Smiles for Haiti.

have been University trained, they just lack the income and materials to provide that care," admits Georgina.

Because of the supplies donated throughout the year from dental suppliers in the Hamilton area, the clinic is subsidized through HSFH.

And through it all Georgina's commitment continues for Haiti. "Many people in Hamilton continue to provide supplies and support for the project. God continues to bless the project, although it is not without its struggles. Financial donations will help extend and broaden this initiative." Assisting with this extension, students from the Canadian College of Dental Health raised \$830 in the Hamilton Road to Hope race in the fall of 2007.

The fifth annual HSFH silent auction and dance with buffet takes place on Sat., April 26 at Our Lady of Lourdes parish hall. For additional information, please visit www.healthysmilesforhaiti.org or call 905-389-7602.