

# A dental clinic to smile about

## Clark students help the community

By TOM VOGT  
Columbian staff writer

A dental hygiene class wasn't just an academic exercise for Clark College students who set up shop in a Hazel Dell parking lot.

They had an opportunity to help the community while gaining hands-on experience.

Margaret Waddell, Annie Chester, Cathy Sargent and Becca Pike are students in Clark College's class in dental public health. Their afternoon session, applying sealants on kids' teeth at the Boys and Girls Clubs in Hazel Dell, was part of a year-long project.

"It's good to get involved in the prevention end," Sargent said. Particularly when it means working with people who don't always get to the dentist.

"It's important that our

curriculum prepares dental hygienists to deliver quality care to all segments of society," said Gail Liberman, chair of Clark's dental hygiene division. "And that's outside the dental office, and in the community."

Clark College's partners in the project include the Free Clinic of Southwest Washington and the Clark County Health Department. The free clinic provided its dental van, as well as dental hygienist Ann Gilbert, coordinator of the clinic's dental program.

Gilbert also is a student, although at a different level; she is working toward her bachelor's degree in dental hygiene at Clark College through a four-year program offered by Eastern Washington University. Melody Sheer,

DENTAL, page C5



DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

**Clark College dental hygiene students Annie Chester, left, and Cathy Sargent give 9-year-old Tyler Cunningham a free dental exam earlier this month in the Free Clinic's dental van.**

### Did you know?

■ According to a survey taken during the 2004-2005 school year, 58 percent of second- and third-grade children in Clark County had cavities or fillings (the state rate was 60 percent); 39 percent of third-graders had access to dental sealants (the state rate was 44 percent). On the positive side, only 12 percent had untreated decay (the statewide rate was 20 percent).

## Dental:

From page C1

oral health coordinator with the Clark County Health Department, teaches the class.

"She's the one who understands the need in the community," Liberman said. "We leaped at the opportunity to have someone really knowledgeable about community health. She has the contacts."

This is the second year for the class. But it's the first year the students have been able to use the dental van, which the free clinic purchased a year ago after receiving \$250,000 from an anonymous donor.

The dental hygiene students aren't just designing hypothetical outreach efforts, Scheer said.

By making "house calls," they actually are providing care for populations without

access to dental care. "There's obviously a need," Waddell said.

The project started in November with a community assessment, then Clark teams established relationships with other community agencies.

While one team worked with the Boys and Girls Clubs at 409 N.E. Anderson Road, next to Hazel Dell Elementary School, other students linked up with a range of different locations.

They include a homeless shelter; the teen mothers program at Hudson's Bay High School; Head Start; a children's therapy center; and a nutrition program for women, infants and children.

To gauge the level of the kids' oral health, "We did a screening with a disclosing agent that shows plaque" on teeth, Chester said. And, the screenings showed "lots of red."

The sealant is a plastic coat-

ing, Sargent explained, and her team was targeting pits and fissures in teeth, "where decay starts," she said.

"And places where the toothbrush can't reach," Pike added.

But it was already too late for some kids. The dental hygiene students came across several children with serious decay.

"All we could do was chart it, then seal those teeth without obvious decay," Liberman said.

"Cavities are a completely preventable disease," Liberman added. "It's very cheap and easy to prevent decay."

"If we can get them to 12 years old without decay, they most likely will keep that tooth, cavity free, into adult life," Gilbert said.

**TOM VOGT** writes about health issues for *The Columbian*. Contact him at 360-759-8008 or at [tom.vogt@columbian.com](mailto:tom.vogt@columbian.com).