



Photos by ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Aaden Bemis, 5, receives fillings Saturday from Dr. Remy Eussen, right, and dental assistant Stephanie Johnson during the fourth annual Children's Dental Health Day at Clark College's dental clinic. Aaden had two cavities, and Eussen's advice was to slow down on the soda and juice.

The gift of a child's smile

By LAURA McVICKER
Columbian staff writer

Clark College's dental clinic was buzzing Saturday, as dentists and assistants shuffled in and out of a large room, shuttling children from screenings to dental chairs.

Annual free dental clinic checks in on thousands of teeth

Amid the commotion sat a nervous 5-year-old Aaden Bemis, waiting to get two cavities filled. His mom, Tori Bemis, stood close by.

Once it was over, the boy emerged with a colorful goodie bag and a shy, relieved smile.

"We're tough, aren't we?" Bemis praised her son outside the clinic.

Aaden wasn't the only one relieved. Bemis is a Brush Prairie stay-

at-home mom, and her husband's job as a contractor doesn't cover dental work. So when the family got wind of the free dental care, they were ecstatic.

"I had bad teeth and was in and out of dentists'



Volunteers at Saturday's Dental Health Day at Clark College's dental clinic treated 350 children whose families are uninsured and can't afford visits to the dentist.

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offices forever," said Bemis, whose 11-year-old daughter, Kayci, also went to the clinic Saturday. "I didn't want that for them."

The two were among 350 children who came to the annual Dental Health Day, which provides free care for children whose families are uninsured and can't pay for visits to the dentists.

Since its inception four years ago, the program, sponsored by Ronald McDonald House Charities and the Washington Oral Health Foundation, has provided \$250,000 in treatment services, said Dr. Munib Derhalli, a Vancouver periodontist and past president of the Clark County Dental Society.

Gradually growing in size the last few years, this year's Dental Health Day saw a 10 percent increase in the number of children served since last year.

Melody Scheer, oral health coordinator for Clark County Public Health, attributed the sharper growth to the still-limping economy and the higher number of families out of work.

"There's a lot of people who've lost their insurance," she said. "I would say people are really desperate this year."

Another sign of the desperate times, Scheer said, was the larger number of children seen with serious dental problems,

some requiring multiple fillings or even a root canal.

Volunteers on Saturday did X-rays, fillings and extractions, in addition to providing preventive care such as fluoride treatments and sealants for the children, and oral-hygiene information for their parents.

Care was provided by local dentists, hygienists and assistants, who were also helped by Oregon Health & Science

"I had bad teeth and was in and out of dentists' offices forever. I didn't want that for them."

Tori Bemis
Stay-at-home mom
to two children

Marshall Elementary School, lives with her dad, whose job at a restaurant doesn't offer dental insurance. House helps out with

University dental students.

Children eligible for the care were referred by their schools. That's how 9-year-old Zayla's grandma, Margaret Housel, found out that her granddaughter was eligible.

Zayla, a fourth-grader at George C.

babysitting and keeps an eye out for free dental fairs for her granddaughter. The last time Zayla saw a dentist was at a fair a year and a half ago.

"I watch for those because technically that's all we've got," Housel said. "It's not about my time — it's for her."

Saturday afternoon, Zayla was happy to find out she didn't have any cavities. She got sealants and called it good.

When asked the best part of the visit, she replied wryly: "Being done with it," and promptly left the clinic with her grandma in tow.