



Local dentists offer children free checkups for Give Kids A Smile day

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By **Paul R. Kopenkoskey** | The Grand Rapids Press



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Dr. John T. Frey examines Michael Towers, 11, near registered dental hygienist Lynn Normand, inside Frey's Belmont dentistry practice. Frey will be participating in "Give Kids A Smile" and offer free dental care Feb 4th. He expects to see at least 60 kids between the age of 3-14.

Low-income children who rarely receive dental checkups face a greater risk of plaque, cavities and infections invading their teeth and gums.

That's the underlining reason why area dentists are participating in the free oral health care service for children on Feb. 4 and, locally, on other dates, called **Give Kids A Smile**.

Sponsored by the American Dental Association, thousands of dentists in West Michigan and nationwide will offer free oral health screenings and dental check ups to children up to age 18. GKAS comes attached with a political directive as well.

Last year, for reasons likely attributed to a major snow storm on GKAS day, the total value of care was about \$200,000 in Michigan, said Thomas Kochheiser, director of public affairs for the Michigan Dental Association. Other years, the statewide total value of care provided has been about \$1.1 million annually.

But one day of dental care will not fix the problem a sputtering state economy and a diet consisting of too much refined sugar has generated, say local dentists who consider GKAS a stopgap answer to children's oral health.

IF YOU GO

It is sobering to know, said Belmont dentist Dr. John Frey, that GKAS is the

The following are some of the area dentists accepting young patients for the free Give Kids A Smile program. Note that not

only time some of the kids will sit in a dentist's chair.

all dentists participating in the program are doing so on Feb. 4.

"One of our questions on our health history form asks about a previous dentist," said Frey. "After running the clinic for a few years, I started to see that space filled in with my name as their dentist. Initially, I thought, well no, this child is just here at my clinic for today. It took me a while to realize that, for some of these kids that I see once a year, I'm the only one checking their oral health. So in fact, I am their dentist."

Feb. 4: Hudsonville Family Dentistry
Bradley Dykstra,
DDS3250 Central Blvd.616-669-2040

Feb. 4: Preference Dental
Douglas Killian, DDS
David Hosking,
DDS7255 Nine Mile Road, Mecosta231-972-7104

Feb. 5: Grandville Family Dental Care
Derek Draft, DDS3100
Wilson Ave., SW616-534-7138

Feb. 11: John Leitner, DDS575 Robbins Road
Grand Haven616
-842-2850

Working with Walker-based orthodontist Dr. Laura Fogle, Frey and 14 of his staff members will provide free oral exams, cleanings, fluoride and preventive fillings, at his office at 6220 Jupiter Ave. in Belmont.

For the seventh year in a row, Drs. Dan and Deb Peters will work with the staff at Explorer Elementary School in Kentwood to identify students who need dental care the most. Last year, Peters provided \$17,000 worth of free care to 50 children. The Peters are working in with Dr. Lee Zuidema whose dental practice is next door to theirs.

About 40 National Honor students from East Kentwood High School will act as "ambassadors" to the younger students by assuaging any anxiety they may have, playing games and coloring.

Give Kids A Smile also is meant to send a message to Michigan's lawmakers, said Deb Peters.

The state's Medicaid program for low-income residents often has difficulty finding a dentist willing to accept the public program's low reimbursement rates.

And the state MI-Child program, Healthy Kids, which provides health and dental services to low-income pregnant women, babies and children, is not available in Kent County.

"We want them to see donated care is not an answer to dental care," said Peters. "One day of dental care not enough. "With our government, perhaps we can work with a fresh approach."

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