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DENTAL

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triage center and an X-ray station.

"If it wasn't for this, I would have to wait for tax time," said South Norfolk resident Jessamy, who has a job but no insurance until she pays a year of premiums. "Dental work is a luxury."

Harper and Melissa Sears of Newport News work in fast food, and dental insurance is unavailable to them because they are not management.

"We have no insurance whatsoever," said Harper, who has needed several of his bottom teeth pulled for at least a year. "All the dentists in Newport News and nobody has an opening. When they do, they want an arm and a leg to pull teeth."

Spence went to the dentist three years ago and was told she needed a half dozen fillings.

"I couldn't afford it," she admitted, awaiting an X-ray.



After two days of dental procedures, Tina Favre of Newport News takes a look at herself – the first time she had smiled in over a year. She gives Carol Cleckner, wife and dental assistant of Dr. Dennis Cleckner, a hug after getting two new front teeth and having damage corrected to other teeth, the result of a physical assault she suffered last year.



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"I just heard about this clinic from a friend last night. I'm really excited about it."

Community outreach

Dental Access Days was sponsored by local dentists Dag Zapatero and Albert Konikoff. Both are alums of the Pankey Institute, a non-profit organization in Key Biscayne, Fla., that promotes

oral health care through continuing education.

The community outreach brought together dentists, hygienists and assistants from all over Hampton Roads, largely on an appointment basis with a limited number of walk-ins.

Dentist Dennis Cleckner and his assistant and wife, Carol, were among the vol-

unteers. The couple from Western Branch said their intent, as always, was to put patients at ease.

"No matter where we go, we treat people as if they were our highest paying patients," Carol Cleckner said. "I give them hugs, escort them out. I want them to feel like they're valued, like we're all in this together."

Virginia Beach's Nakesha Johnson appreciated the extra touches. A single mother of three, including 4-year-old twins, Johnson said fixing teeth can easily be put on the back burner when money is tight.

"You ask yourself, 'Can I really put \$200 aside for an X-ray?'" she said.

Johnson has struggled

with her wisdom teeth for the last seven years. The pain worsened three years ago when half of one tooth cracked off. But her job does not include dental insurance, so she put off fixing the problem until Saturday.

"This is a really wonderful service," she said.

Great Bridge's Thomas Bakke echoed that sentiment. A licensed truck driver, Bakke has battled medical problems, losing three jobs in the last five years due to ill health. "I need nine fillings."

Wait time was short for most patients, many of whom left notes of gratitude for the work they received. It was pouring rain when Johnson got out of the chair, but she didn't mind getting drenched on the way to her car.

"It's messy out here, but I just got two teeth pulled," she said, showing off a huge smile. "I'm so happy."

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