

HOW MANY KIDS DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A SCHOOL FOR ONE DAY?

STORY BY CHARLOTTE HSU

PHOTOS BY MARK MULVILLE

700 smiles

HUNDREDS—maybe 700 altogether. That’s the number of children who received free oral health care and learned about oral hygiene at the School of Dental Medicine on Feb. 5 during the ninth annual Give Kids A Smile Day, a national initiative to encourage healthy dental habits early in life.

From morning through the afternoon on a wintry Friday, young people and their parents flowed in and out of Squire Hall, where volunteers welcomed them and checked coats. Patients, including boys and girls from Head Start arriving on large yellow school buses, received free dental exams, fluoride treatment, X-rays, sealant and instruction on how to take care of their teeth and gums.

Legions of volunteers, among them students, staff and faculty from UB, Erie Community College and UB’s Educational Opportunity Center, offered services in Squire Hall and at Women and Children’s Hospital of Buffalo and Mercy Hospital. At Squire, Smile Day participants filled two clinics, including the first-floor pediatric suite, complete with its pastel walls and stuffed teeth. Dentists and employees from private practices joined in the effort. Sabretooth, the Buffalo Sabres’ mascot, walked the hallways, posing for photographs with families.

Buffalo Mayor Byron W. Brown visited UB in the morning to offer support for the event, praising the dental school for its “tremendous work in the community” and reading a proclamation making it Give Kids a Smile Day in the City of Buffalo.

“You don’t hear about all of the work that they do,” Brown said about the school’s Smile Team, “but I can tell you they are in every section of the community, making



CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE ►



sure that families, and in particular children, get good dental care. And we want to thank them for that.”

For the children, Give Kids A Smile Day was no regular day at the dentist. Balloons and grinning volunteers greeted the young patients. At the Teddy Bear Clinic in Harriman Hall, boys and girls made their way through a series of stations where they learned about health and health professions by taking care of stuffed animals, brushing their teeth and “examining” the toothy dolls for medical problems.

Even sitting in the dentist’s chair in the Squire clinic, many children were laughing. “Open wide like an alligator,” the volunteer dentists said. “Open big like a lion.”

Parents were grateful for the service. “My kids haven’t had a dental visit actually for about a year and a half, almost two years, so this was a great opportunity to have everything done at one time,” said Diane Lyons, who brought her teenage daughter and son. “They had their exam, they had their cleaning, they had X-rays... They found a couple of cavities that we wouldn’t even have known [my son] had, and he’s having all the work done today. And my daughter, here, is having sealants put on, so yeah, we’re going to be all set.

“It’s great,” she said, “because we don’t have any dental insurance.”





(ABOVE) THE GIANT STRAWBERRY CONE IN THE TEDDY BEAR CLINIC WAS A SOURCE OF FASCINATION.

(OPPOSITE CENTER) MAYOR BYRON W. BROWN PROCLAIMED IT GIVE KIDS A SMILE DAY FOR THE CITY OF BUFFALO, THEN JOINED HEAD START PUPILS IN A SPIRITED RENDITION OF THE ABC SONG.

With a little help from our friends

UB UNDERGRADUATES WITH HIGH ASPIRATIONS JOIN THE GKAS TEAM

BY JUDSON MEAD

THE DAY BEFORE Give Kids a Smile Day, Martin Smallidge, a UB undergraduate, is unpacking boxes of toothbrushes for the hundreds of giveaway packages he and fellow volunteers are putting together in a small conference room piled high with supplies in the Department of Community and Pediatric Dentistry.

He'd inked more than 225 nametags the night before for GKAS volunteers—community practitioners, dental hygienists, assistants and others—who'd be arriving the next morning just ahead of the children.

In the next room, Michelle Lee, also a UB undergraduate, makes copies of chair assignments for the next day. The office suite has the intensity of a war room, with staff and faculty hurrying to complete every final detail. The undergraduates are foot soldiers.

Or, more accurately, cadets. The two are members of the UB Pre-Dental Association—respectively, president and vice president. These future dental students and their fellow association members are a valuable source of volunteer help with the hundreds of small jobs that must be done beforehand to make Give Kids a Smile Day run smoothly.

The pre-dental club is relatively new, founded by students only five years ago. Rina Patel, its first (and three-term) president, steered the group through the requirements to an official UB Student Association charter.

Kimberly Cuddy, last year's Pre-Dental Association president, is now a first-year student in the School of Dental Medicine.

Smallidge will be starting at the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine next fall.

And Michelle Lee, who is a UB



MARTIN SMALLIDGE, UB PRE-DENTAL ASSOCIATION

sophomore, has already been accepted into the UB dental school, directly from high school, through the combined undergraduate-DDS degree program.

What brought them together was their shared ambition to go to dental school.

Before the Pre-Dental Association was formed, UB undergraduates who intended to go to dental school might find each other by happenstance, maybe in a

biology class or at one of Kaplan's DAT prep courses.

Now, they're just a listserv away from each other. Smallidge has 180 e-mail addresses of UB undergraduates who intend to go to dental school; he and fellow association members go to UB new-student orientation to talk about the group. He says there are about 25-30 members who are regulars at association events.

To become a UB Student Association-sanctioned (and subsidized) student organization, the pre-dental group had to demonstrate commitment by, among other things, volunteering in the community. They signed on for UB-organized house painting and neighborhood cleanups. Once they'd proven themselves,

tist, an Army recruiter who discussed the option of combining dental school with a military commitment, and a representative of the Kaplan DAT prep course.

Smallidge made his first appearance at Give Kids a Smile Day as a sophomore, responding to an e-mail call for volunteers. He spent the day in the Teddy Bear Clinic dressed as Superman. Last year, the association executive board decided the group could be more involved with the school and pushed to get out more volunteers. He was a frequent volunteer with the UB Smile Team this past summer as it spread the word about oral health care (and he handed out toothbrushes and dental floss) at health fairs.

Smallidge came to UB from Boonville, N.Y., to study to be a dentist.

place in the dental school so long as she successfully jumps through the hoops of maintaining an impeccable academic record and passing the DAT and logging a sufficient number of hours of clinical observation. She assisted residents in the AEGD clinic for 3-4 hours a week during her freshman year.

Michelle Lee endured good-natured teasing from Smallidge who would introduce her to new association members as "this lucky one" who is already admitted. But, she is quick to say, she's working as hard to stay in as her fellow members are to get in.

Classmate Lauren Meyers also plans to apply for early assurance this spring. She says a main benefit of the association is the support and help members give

each other with all the detail that goes into the countdown to a dental application process.

"I seem to connect well with children. Maybe it's because I'm short and don't intimidate them."

LAUREN MEYERS

it occurred to the members that they really should be volunteering at the dental school. Their involvement with Give Kids a Smile Day has been growing ever since.

The club holds occasional social events—bowling, rock climbing—and more regular coffee "meet ups" and fundraisers, but the main activities involve its reason for being—learning more about the profession of dentistry, about what dental school is like and, of course, how to get admitted.

"I'd say it's really a disadvantage not to get involved in the association," Cuddy says. As a dental student (school is "difficult, but you get used to it"), she keeps up with the members of the pre-dental group by e-mail, mostly answering questions about the dental school interview—what to expect, what to do.

Cuddy says that when she was an undergraduate, she met a number of dental students who were happy to come to meetings to answer questions. In addition to dental students, the association has recently heard presentations by Greg Hudecki, '72, the Buffalo Bills team den-

Although he will go to dental school in Pittsburgh—he was also accepted at UB, but says trying out a new city was a big appeal—UB gave him exactly what he came for: access to dental school, even if only as an observer, volunteer and student researcher.

UB sophomore and Pre-Dental Association member Josh Lee, from Greene, N.Y., came for the same reason. He is applying to early assurance admission this year. Among other benefits of belonging to the pre-dental student community is getting tips about how to set up his coursework: he heard that comparative primate anatomy will help with gross anatomy, so he's planning to take it in the last semester of his senior year—the fresher the better.

Michelle Lee (no relation to Josh) is the daughter of Ivan Lee, '84, who she says is "very, very proud of UB." He practices in Manhattan; she started watching and then assisting him at 14 and a year later was observing oral surgeries without blinking. A Stuyvesant High School graduate, she came to UB guaranteed a

Even though it's still early in her undergraduate academic career, Meyers, who is the granddaughter of a dentist, already has an idea that she'd like to specialize in pediatric dentistry.

"I seem to connect well with children," she says. "Maybe it's because I'm short and don't intimidate them."

At the other end of the journey to dental school, Smallidge, who has seen almost every aspect of dental school—from oral biology bench science, to clinical dentistry, to community outreach—wants some of all of it. His ideal now is to be a practitioner and a scientist and an academic. And he's thinking about adding public health to his program in Pittsburgh.

It's a long way from volunteering to be Superman for a day. Or is it?

That these young men and women pitch in behind the scenes is a boon to Give Kids a Smile Day. That they help each other with advice, encouragement and fellowship on the road to dental school is a good thing for everyone, especially the dental profession.

