College’s dental clinic helping local students

By ERICA NEWPORT

State College of Florida’s first and second-year dental hygiene students are helping Boys & Girls Clubs of Manatee County members get dental treatment.

The Manatee County Dental Society and the Manatee-Sarasota Dental Hygiene Association are working with the students to help club members who attend Harllee Middle and Daughtrey Elementary schools.

About six times a year, the hand-picked club youths visit volunteer dentists and hygienists at the clinic, receiving free cleanings, X-ray exams, fluoride treatments, sealants and fillings from volunteers.

On March 24, Boys & Girls Club member John Johnson, 10, reclined in a dental chair in the SCF clinic as Dr. Robert Hynton examined his teeth for free.

“This is a way the dental society can give back to community through a select group of kids that otherwise would not have a way to see the dentist,” said Hynton, community health chairman of the society. “So, we partner with the Boys & Girls Club, SCF and its school of dental hygiene to help youth in preventative care and restorative work.”

Hynton said the mission for the volunteer dentists is to instill in the youth a better understanding of why they need to take care of their teeth, how they need to take care of their teeth and the long-term benefits of preventative care.

John gave two thumbs-up from the chair. After a morning in the classroom learning about dental hygiene health, Hynton casually talked him through the examination and cleaning.

Anita Weaver, the college’s director of the dental hygiene program and founder of the community collaboration, was there to ensure 20 club youths saw one of five volunteer dentists.

“Some of these children are seeing a dentist for the first time, and that tells us there’s lack of care in the neighborhood,” Weaver said. She said the lack of treatment for the youth might be based on a lack of transportation and money.

“If we can get the child here, then we can try to get them checked out,” she said. “We are giving dental students an opportunity to practice, and although they don’t perform services, they do everything else. The networking is truly amazing.”
The society’s volunteer dentists tend to return each time the clinic is offered on Saturdays, Hynton said, and they get hooked on helping out youths whose teeth are transitioning from primary to adult teeth.

Dental hygiene students also make connections with local dentists and their offices, often lining up work for when their two-year program is completed.

Magdalena Toporowicz, a second-year hygiene student, said her classroom colleagues were all at the clinic to help the children and practice their newly acquired skills.

While the children may start the day a little stressed and shaky, the best part is seeing their smiles at the end, Tomorowicz said as she sat beside club member Marleni Caballero, 12, a seventh-grader at Harlee.

“They made three fillings today,” Marleni said. “Yes, I was kind of scared because they put a needle in my gums, but they also helped me to keep my teeth clean, and I think it was a really good experience.”

Dr. Robert Hynton joined four other volunteer dentists involved with the Manatee County Dental Society at the State College of Florida’s dental clinic to ensure that selected Boys & Girls Club youth, whose families are without the resources for preventative dental care, got the help they needed. Among them were John Johnson, who relaxed in the dental chair. CORRESPONDENT PHOTOS / ERICA NEWPORT