



# JOHN TOWNSEND

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 52ND DISTRICT

November 17, 2010

State Rep. Frederick Kessler  
Chair, Special Committee on Health Care Access  
Room 302 North, State Capitol  
PO Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Kessler:

The *Fond du Lac Reporter* recently ran the enclosed article, which describes Fond du Lac County's "Save a Smile" dental program. This program, which is the only one of its kind in Wisconsin, reimburses area dentists at a rate of sixty percent for treating children nineteen years old or younger who qualify for medical assistance.

Since the program began, at least 1,600 Fond du Lac County children have been treated, and the program recently received a \$400,000 grant from the federal government.

I thought the members of the Health Care Access committee might be interested in reading this article, so I have enclosed enough copies for each of them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John".

John F. Townsend  
Wisconsin State Assembly  
52<sup>nd</sup> Assembly District

JFT:mdp

CC: Richard Sweet and Heidi Frechette, Legislative Council

# ONE SMILE AT A TIME

## Innovative program provides dental care for the youngest victims of poverty

BY SHARON ROZNIK  
The Reporter  
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Fond du Lac County is leading the way in providing dental care for the youngest victims of poverty.

Since the Save a Smile dental program began three years ago, area dentists have seen the worst of the worst cases, and treated at least 1,600 youth.

"We are talking about some young children whose front teeth are black stubs. They can't eat or sleep or concentrate," said Samantha Twohig, oral health coordinator for Fond du Lac County.

The innovative dental program is the only one of its kind in the state, Twohig said, and is held up as a model for other communities.

Operated through the Fond du Lac County Health Department, Save a Smile serves children in the county ages 19 and younger who qualify for Wisconsin's Medical Assistance. Twohig, a dental assistant, said early childhood caries are five times more common than asthma.

### Local care

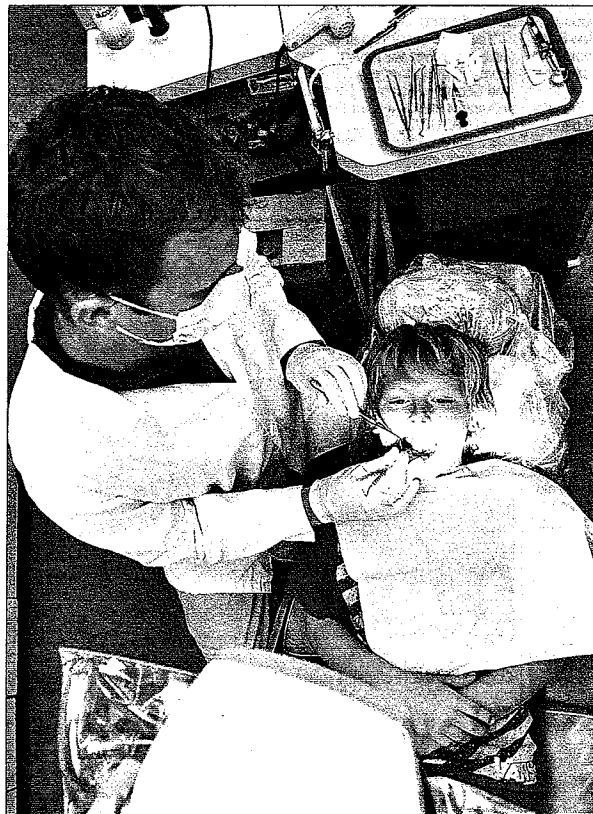
Before enrolling in the program, Stephanie Peterson was driving her three children, ages 3, 9 and 11, to Madison to receive necessary dental care.

Her son needed some fillings, a couple of baby teeth pulled, and sealants placed on his teeth.

"It's been a blessing for my kids to be able to get their teeth taken care of right in town. The dentist has been kind and courteous to us and explained to my son the importance of brushing his teeth, not just pretending to," she said.

Dr. Jeff Kraig of Dr. Jeff Kraig Family Dentistry was an early proponent of addressing the significant needs of children whose families are at or near poverty level. Kraig is past president and current trustee of the Wisconsin Dental Association.

He said before the Save a Smile program, the inequity in reimbursement



THE REPORTER PHOTO BY PATRICK FLOOD

Dr. Chris Maury of Maury Dental of Fond du Lac checks out the teeth of 9-year-old Samuel Peterson. Maury is one of 39 dentists participating in Fond du Lac County's Save a Smile program.

**"It's been a blessing for my kids to be able to get their teeth taken care of right in town. The dentist has been kind and courteous to us and explained to my son the importance of brushing his teeth, not just pretending to."**

Stephanie Peterson, parent

for treatment of those on Medical Assistance placed a burden on dentists.

About 15,000 families in the county receive Medical Assistance.

On average, dentists were receiving 30 percent (of costs) reimbursement from the government. In comparison, Save a Smile reimburses dentists at a rate of 60 percent.

"Dentists do a lot of pro bono work as it is, but we have limits on what we can do. The

county has blessed us by agreeing to set up payment that is significantly better than the state," Kraig said.

In 2007, the Fond du Lac County Board approved \$90,000 annually to fund the program. Another \$60,000 in grant money brings the program's annual budget up to about \$150,000.

This year, Save a Smile was awarded a \$400,000 federal grant, which Twohig says will help address the substantial waiting list of children

needing dental care.

"When I started, literally, we had nothing going other than calling in a few favors to random dentists. Local families had to drive to Madison or Milwaukee to get dental care for their children, so this program has been life-changing," Twohig said.

Children signed up for the program go through an initial screening, and both parents and kids are provided with instructions on good dental care. Needs are established during that first visit, and appointments are coordinated with dentists.

### Prevention

The goal, she said, is to establish a dental home

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## SMILES

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for families so they receive consistent and ongoing care. Prevention is also a key component of the program.

"The main contributors of decay are lack of education and poor oral health. It's generational — if parents never had access to dental care and they don't know about good dental hygiene, that can't reach their kids," Twohig said.

"I am seeing everything from kids having nothing wrong to small children that need to be placed in a hospital setting to have their entire mouth worked on. It's not uncommon for these children never to have seen a dentist," she said.

Sometimes, Twohig will pick a child up herself if they can't get to a dental office. There isn't a day she said when there isn't a dental emergency.

"You do what you have to do. It's an amazing opportunity," she said.

Dr. Chris Maury is one of 39 area dentists who clear time in their busy schedules each week to treat Save a Smile patients. Dentists in communities throughout the county — including Campbellsport, Ripon and Mount Calvary — donate their time.

"We don't have a big (parent) network, but because Sam (Twohig) is there, she's done a great job of reaching out to dentists," he said.

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