

Dental clinic to open for inexpensive and free care

By Vegar Stokset
Emerald Contributor

A dream of a dental clinic for poor and low-income people in Lane County may become reality within a year.

Janet Anderson of United Way is part of a Lane County coalition of organizations working to provide inexpensive and free dental care.

"Lack of dental care is a serious problem facing thousands of poor and low-income people in Lane County," Anderson said. "For many of these people, a toothache or embarrassment over unattractive teeth will even prevent them from going to work or to school."

Responding to a large group of people in need, the coalition of about 30 organizations plans to open a free-standing clinic for low-income people of all ages in January 1994.

United Way, the White Bird Clinic, 4J School District, area dental and medical associations, and other organizations are involved in the coalition, which meets monthly to plan the clinic.

They plan to operate the clinic with volunteer dentists and minimum wage staff. The clinic will be built under the same concept as the White Bird Clinic, said Bob Dritz, White Bird director. The dental clinic could treat up to 4,000 patients each year.

A survey performed by United Way last spring revealed that in Lane County more than 20,000 people with low incomes, mental disabilities or children lacked dental care services. Most dentists in the area would not see these people, according to the survey.

Dritz has been heavily involved in the

project from the start. He said the problem intensified a year and a half ago, when state welfare payments stopped covering dental services.

Dritz said staff at the emergency clinic at Sacred Heart General Hospital reported an urgent need for dental care among poor people.

"The Sacred Heart Hospital emergency room each month sees more than 200 people who have no other way of getting dental services," Dritz said. "Dentists in the area simply do not treat indigent welfare patients."

Dritz said even if welfare does reimburse the patients' costs, the dentists will not treat them. The dentists don't feel that the reimbursement is adequate, he said.

Dentist Steven Thurn said the state government, not the dentists, is to blame for the problem.

"We hate to see these people hurting, and for two years we have treated emergency cases without being paid," Thurn said. "But the state of Oregon decided to abandon these people. They cut reimbursements and said that if you had no insurance, you could not get any dental treatment — not even in an emergency."

Thurn said the state has never adequately reimbursed the costs for welfare patients' dental care. And after July 1991, when the state stopped all but the reimbursements for children, the dentists could not see these patients at all.

Stephanie Larson, state Rep. Cynthia Wooten's assistant, said the state is now in the process of cutting \$1.2 billion from the 1993-95 budget. Larson said this means there are no chances of changing the reimbursement policies soon.

Fan-tastic



Photo by Michael Shindler

Heejae Chung, a University junior, performs the Korean fan dance at the Asian Celebration Sunday at the Lane County Fairgrounds.

Police say violent attacks and robbery doubled this year

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Overall reported crime dropped by 2 percent in Eugene last year, but serious crimes such as violent attacks and robberies increased, according to the Eugene police department's 1992 crime report.

The police department's report, released last week, reported 197 aggravated assaults last year, almost twice the number of the previous year. Aggravated assaults are violent attacks that often include a weapon and result in physical injury.

EPD Patrol Capt. Jim Horton said police have seen more one-on-one assaults in Eugene the past few months.

"People seem to be less tolerant toward one another, toward those they view as different in some way," Horton said.

Robbery, another serious offense, occurred 19 times in Eugene last year, representing an 18 percent increase compared to 1991. Less than 40 percent of those cases have cleared.

The overwhelming majority of crimes in Eugene continue to be property crimes, according to the report. In 1992, burglaries increased by 9 percent from 1,570 in

1991, and thefts from vehicles increased to 1,850, in addition to the 2,931 other thefts.

Bicycle owners also were a vulnerable group in Eugene. Stolen last year were 1,278 bikes, 20 percent more than the previous year. Horton said police have increased undercover and patrol activity in the University area because that is where a majority of the thefts occurred.

Horton encouraged students to get a solid lock for their bikes, have them registered and keep the receipt.

On the whole, the Eugene police department handled a total of 135,127 calls from service, traffic and persons stops in 1992, about the same number as 1991.

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