



Aldo Rivera, a student at Kenersville Elementary School, looks at the X-ray machine.

Photos by Christine Rucker

## All Smiles

### Local dentist volunteers her time and services to local children

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD  
THE CHRONICLE

Twenty-one percent of children entering kindergarten in Forsyth County already have tooth decay. That is why Dr. Tina Merhoff, a pediatric dentist, offered her services free of charge to 20 underprivileged children from the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System on Friday.

Merhoff participated in "Give a Kid a Smile," a nationwide campaign that raises awareness of children's dental needs. Merhoff, who opened her private practice in April 2001, was on faculty at the department of dentistry of Wake Forest University School of Medicine, where she specialized in children with special dental needs.

"These children are our future. When a child is missing school from an abscessed tooth, when they're sick from an abscessed tooth, when they're being made fun of as a young child, what kind of start is that?" Merhoff said.

Children aged 5 to 10 years old from Bolton Elementary School, Kenersville Elementary School, Boonville Elementary and Latham Elementary School had their teeth cleaned, cavities filled, X-rays, tooth extractions, fluoride treatments and any necessary dental attention needed to improve their oral health. Most of the children Merhoff saw during her free clinic hours had never been seen by a dentist before.

"The funding in our state with Medicaid has been at a nationwide low, and now they're ... looking to cut it

even further, which is going to limit the access (to dental care) for these children," Merhoff said.

Dental disease, says Merhoff, is just as detrimental to the immune system as other diseases of the body. Painful tooth infections that go untreated can weaken a child's immune system, placing the child at risk for other serious infections.

April Eastridge, a clinical assistant of Merhoff, said, "These children don't have dental hygiene, and it's just a great experience to help these kids, get them out of pain and show them the proper brushing and flossing instructions, and they go out of here in a better state than when they came in."

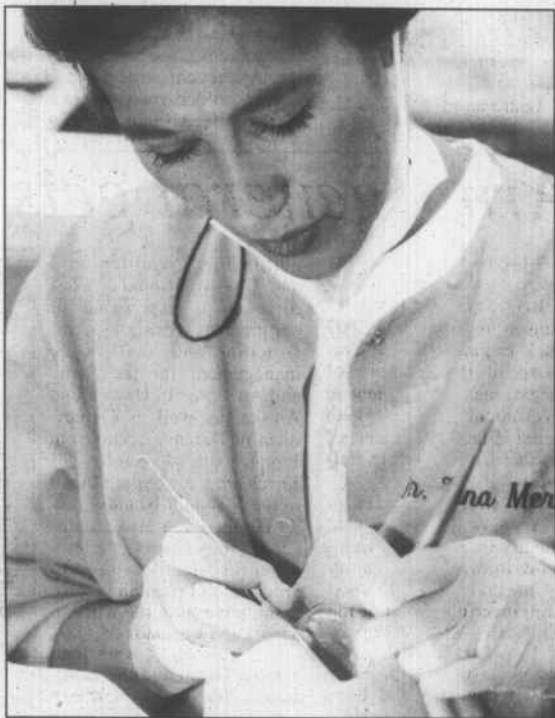
Merhoff and her staff were also certain to talk to the kids about their diet and nutrition. Juice, says Merhoff, is a major contributor to tooth decay in young children. Children were given stickers, toothbrushes and tips on how to take care of their teeth at home.

"If they're drinking juice, then that constant exposure (to juice) is putting sugar on their teeth. Juices are high in sugar," said Merhoff, who recommends that children begin going to the dentist by age 1.

The Health Resources and Service Administration says that at least 26 million American children are suffering from chronic dental pain and disease. More than half of all children in the United States from 6 to 8 years old have dental decay. Fifty-one million school hours are missed per year in the United States because of dental-related illnesses.

Tina Tuttle brought 11 children from Latham Elementary School to the free dental clinic. Tuttle, who is an ESL teacher at Latham, said many of her students are unfam-

See **Dentist** on A10



Dr. Tina Merhoff works on a child's teeth.

## Newspaper honors women with local ties

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Holly Stepp, a city native, was recently awarded with one of the highest honors given by The State, the largest newspaper in South Carolina. Stepp, 28, the education editor for the Columbia-based paper, picked up the 2002 Ambrose E. Gonzales Award for excellence in editorship, photography, graphics or design.

The award is named for the co-founder of The State.

Alan Horton, vice president of Scripps-Howard Newspapers, selected Stepp to receive the award after she was nominated by the paper's staff.

"I can't judge what the education coverage was like before Ms. Stepp took charge, but it's exemplary now," he

said in an article recently printed in The State.

Stepp is the daughter of city residents Vera and Henry Stepp. She has worked at The State since last year. A 1996 graduate of the University of North Carolina, Stepp worked as an education reporter at the Miami Herald before going to The State.

Valerie Bauerlein, a reporter with a Winston-Salem connection, was awarded along with Stepp. Bauerlein, 31, a former city government reporter for the Winston-Salem Journal, picked up the paper's 2002 Ambrose G. Hampton Award for excellence in writing. Bauerlein covers the state Legislature.

Both women received plaques and checks for \$1,000.

## Group says Bush budget unkind to after-school programs for youngsters

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

A state organization that works to make after-school programs more accessible says that President Bush's proposed budget would create a roadblock for its plans to make sure that every American child has access to such programs by 2010.

The Afterschool Alliance predicts that the state would lose more than \$8 million for after-school programs next year if Congress gives the president's budget the green light. The Bush budget includes cutting funding to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, a major federal after-school initiative, by nearly half. The alliance says that its data shows that close to 12,000 young people in the state and 1.6 million children throughout the country would lose access to after-school programs if the budget is pushed through.

"We are not nearly meeting the demand for after-school in America today. To cut back even further, as the president proposes, would be to betray our children, their parents and the communities."



Samelson

said Judy Y. Samelson, executive director of Afterschool Alliance. "The Afterschool Alliance is encouraging citizens to contact their representatives to complain about the proposed cuts."

"Everyone who cares about keeping children safe in the afternoons and providing them with academic support should oppose a cut in after-school funding," Samelson said.

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Winston-Salem, NC  
Refreshments served  
11 a.m.

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### Notice of Public Meeting

WHO WINSTON-SALEM DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

WHAT US 52 LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION STUDY

WHEN THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2003 PRESENTATION AT TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC) MEETING 4:15 PM OPEN HOUSE 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

WHERE WINSTON-SALEM CITY HALL SOUTH 100 EAST FIRST STREET FIFTH FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBER

The Winston-Salem Department of Transportation (WS DOT) has contracted with the consulting firm of RS&H to prepare the US 52 Land Use and Transportation Plan for the US 52 Corridor between Interstate 40 and Rural Hall. A presentation will be made during the TAC meeting, which begins at 4:15 PM followed by an Open House between 6:00 PM and 8:00 PM.

Visit the US 52 WEBSITE at [www.us52studyc.com](http://www.us52studyc.com)

Persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations should call (336) 727-2707 at least 48 hours prior to the meeting to make arrangements.

#### For more information contact:

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