

Drumright Dental's "All-in" Culture of Volunteering

BY ANNE BAER

Here's a riddle: what do you get more of when you give it away? If you ask any Drumright Dental staff member, they will readily answer, "The best of yourself." Instilling a culture of giving within his business, Dr. Travis Burkett, owner of Drumright Dental Center of Oklahoma, and his entire staff reach beyond the walls of the dental office to make a difference in people's lives. At the heart of this practice is an attitude of giving back. Whether it is a homegrown program, partnering with a statewide service, or staff trips to Central and South America's unserved rural communities, the team at Drumright is empowered to both imagine new opportunities and team up with existing programs.

Drumright Dental's legacy of giving started in 1999 when Dr. Bob Melton, founder of Drumright Dental, was first bitten by the volunteering bug. He returned from a dental mission trip to Africa and found that he "came away with more than he had given away". That set the stage for a steady stream of annual mission trips and community care programs. When Dr.

Burkett joined Drumright Dental in 2007, he continued the tradition and has overseen its expansion. International missions to Honduras, Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru followed. Locations are often the outgrowth of organizations referred to them by patients or employees. For instance, next year's trip to Brazil's Amazon Basin was born out of a patient's suggestion to contact a missionary in the country.

Every staff member who travels takes care of their own expenses, but that hasn't dampened involvement. If anything, it has fostered a culture of volunteerism in the practice and has opened the door for "mission" work in their backyard. In fact, some programs grew out of staff member's suggestions. Drumright's unique program, "Love Thy Neighbor", was the brainchild of Cynthia Bassham, a hygienist at the clinic. With small children at home, Cynthia wasn't able to travel, but still wanted to share her skills with those in need. She noticed Drumright's Medicaid patients—mainly children—had parents or guardians that did not qualify for dental care but

were conscientious enough to bring their children to the dentist.

With support from Dr. Burkett, Cynthia suggested offering these adults a day of free dentistry and encouraging the entire staff to volunteer. Now in its sixth year, the one-day annual event has grown from serving 53 patients a day to 97 and has provided close to \$2 million in donated dentistry and lab services. The program is so popular all available appointments are filled months in advance. As both doctors attest, "Patients feel cared for and feel like a real person, not shamed for having bad teeth. It's a great feeling to give someone a healthy smile."

Drumright's team also has a very unique population it serves: the athletes of Oklahoma's Special Olympics. At the suggestion of Robin Dunaway, the office's marketing manager, Drumright Dental volunteered to help. After completing training through Special Olympics, Dr. Burkett is the "go to" person for Oklahoma's program. He serves as clinical director




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of Special Smiles, which offers dental screening designed to provide athletes with oral hygiene education, nutrition education and free protective mouth guards. Each year, Dr. Burkett and a crew of 24 to 26 staff members take a full day out of the office to screen athletes during Special Olympics' Summer Games.

The team of assistants, hygienists and staff at Drumright is a vital element in the success of each program. Drumright's Burkhart account manager, Jason Corbin sums up the group this way: "Although this practice has grown into a large business, they continue to have a small-town feel. They know their patients well and it comes across in their care. The staff is so community-oriented and it shows in everything they do. Their spirit of selflessness and humility coupled with a readiness to help their fellow citizen

is an inspiration. It all starts with Dr. Burkett and Dr. Melton. Their leadership sets the tone for the practice."

All that energy has been noticed. In July 2014, Drumright Dental was honored with The Journal Record's (Oklahoma City) Beacon Award for Charitable Influence (Small Business), recognizing entities that exemplify the spirit of giving.

Dr. Melton's advice to other doctors and staff interested in giving back, "Just do it. Get your feet wet. Set a date and get it done. You'll be surprised at what you come away with, the unexpected gift of giving back. Each year we add to what we're doing, improving it and shaping it based on feedback from volunteers and patients. It's always trial and error so don't let inexperience stop you." Dr. Burkett adds, "Get your staff involved and let them take on a leadership role. You'll be amazed at what they bring to the office and what they can do." 

THINKING ABOUT JUMPING IN?

- Ask your Burkhart account manager. They offer a wealth of information about options for charitable activities, both at home and abroad, plus with available support.
- Contact your local component dental society or state dental organization. Their web sites may list community events and options for your dental team to get started.
- Poll your dental cohorts. Many team members have connections to organizations or individuals who currently offer or need free dental services. Their ideas may inspire new ways to give back.
- Think beyond the passport. Many communities welcome volunteers who can provide dental care. Find a niche in your local area and get started.

If you have a dental office or dental team you would like featured in Catalyst's Giving Back column, please contact Anne Baer at abaer@burkhartdental.com

