



Supporters of the Haliburton County Volunteer Dental Outreach gather at the Haliburton Legion to celebrate the clinic's opening.

Photo by Luke Schell

# Bill Kerr's dream comes true

## Volunteers celebrate the opening of volunteer dental outreach

By Mark Arike

Bill Kerr had a fairly simple dream: to provide free dental care to Haliburton County residents who are in need and don't have the financial means to pay themselves.

That dream – which proved to be a big project – is now a reality known as the Haliburton County Volunteer Dental Outreach.

Kerr, his dream team, community supporters and local dignitaries attended a special open house event at the Haliburton Legion on June 17 to recognize this significant achievement.

"So many people gave their time, their money, their equipment, their materials ... I really can't spend the time it would take to thank everyone," said Kerr in his opening remarks. A poster with a list of all of the donors and volunteers greeted visitors as they entered the legion.

Kerr, a local resident with a dental practice in the city, told the packed legion that although the idea for a free clinic came out of discussions he had with Haliburton hygienist Lisa Stoughton, a higher power had a hand in things.

"I need to first give credit to God," said Kerr. "He [God] kept putting it on my heart and I kept on coming up with reasons why it wouldn't work. He kept on solving those obstacles and pushed me to move on."

As a dentist who annually makes trips to Honduras to provide dental care to children in need, Kerr came to the realization that there were people in his own community that needed the same support.

"The idea for this started a few years ago when I was treating a child covered under the CINOT (Children In Need of Treatment) program," he said. "Their dentistry was covered by a social assistance program. The mother had an emergency dental appointment, and when I saw her, I took out her tooth. I didn't need to take out her tooth, but the reason I did was because she didn't have any dental coverage and couldn't afford anything else."

Last November, Kerr began making connections that in turn, resulted in action. The first person he approached before moving full speed ahead was former colleague and Haliburton dentist, Ed Smolen.

"I was worried about where I was going to get the dental chair, equipment and x-ray machine from. I went into Ed's office and I told him that I thought it would be a good idea to set up a free clinic for low-income adults in the community," said Kerr.

Smolen responded positively by telling Kerr to take a look around his basement.

"He said, 'hey, I've got some dental equipment in the basement. I've got a chair, x-ray machine, a dental unit ... whatever you want you can have,'" Kerr recalled.

The project really got rolling when Kerr received the support of SIRCH Community Services; the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit (HKPR); and Janis Parker, former Dysart et al councillor and owner of Parker Pad & Printing Ltd.

Kerr and the other organizers formed a steering committee, which became responsible for raising funds for the clinic. Gena Robertson, executive director of SIRCH, worked with the committee and her

staff to develop a screening process that would ensure that those in most need of dental work would get it.

Construction work on the clinic, which is located beside Canoe FM on 739 Mountain St., began in March. Local contractors donated their time to project and most of the materials were provided at cost.

On May 19, the clinic officially opened and welcomed its first patients.

Kerr pointed out the clinic is able to operate on a much smaller budget than a regular practice because all those who provide care are volunteers.

Kerr's wife agreed with her husband's points, but stepped up to

the podium to give her opinion on where she felt the true inspiration for the clinic originated.

"I think the seed was planted many year's ago when Bill's dad, Dr. John Kerr, told everyone at his practice that it was a privilege to practice dentistry," she said. "I think that philosophy is flowing through our dental outreach clinic."

She added that it was always his wish to one day practice free dentistry work.

Local MP Barry Devolin dropped by the ceremony to congratulate the group on what he viewed as a "nice, peaceful and professional" clinic.

"I'm glad I got to go [visit it] because if anyone asks I can say I've been there, got the T-shirt," said Devolin as he jokingly made reference to the white volunteer shirt he received.

Devolin said he found irony in the fact that Kerr made the connection to Haliburton County while providing care to children in Honduras.

"It's important to remember that there are many members in our

community that have not had the opportunity [to receive proper dental care]. I think it's wonderful that so many people have come together to create this great facility."

MPP Rick Johnson was unable to attend but submitted a statement

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Lisa Kerr and Janis Parker cut the cake.

Photos by Mark Arike



Clinic founder Bill Kerr and father Dr. John Kerr tour the completed clinic.

that was read on his behalf.

"Thank you for providing the residents of Haliburton County a service to help with the dental health needs of low-income families," stated Johnson. "This is a wonderful edition to the community. Thank you for your leadership and your hard work."

Dysart et al Reeve Murray Fearrey also congratulated the group for their work.

The open house ceremony, which was emceed by Canoe FM's Roxanne Casey, concluded with cake and a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Tours of the clinic coincided with the celebration.

To learn more about the volunteer dental outreach visit [www.dental-outreach.com](http://www.dental-outreach.com). Those seeking necessary dental care are encouraged to call SIRCH at 705-457-1742 ext. 44.



The Haliburton District Lions Club hands over a \$1,000 cheque to clinic committee members Lisa Kerr, Bill Kerr, and Betty Mills.