

New Mobile Dental Clinic for the Disabled Unveiled in Valhalla

By Martin Wilbur

Many of us like to steer clear of a trip to the dentist, but a new state-of-the-art office will bring the critically important care to a segment of the population that is often underserved.

Last Wednesday, the Westchester Institute for Human Development (WIHD) unveiled its vastly upgraded mobile dental clinic in Valhalla that will serve the oral hygiene needs of children and adults with disabilities throughout the lower and mid-Hudson Valley.

The 39-foot-long teal Winnebago will allow WIHD to increase the number of patients it serves, replacing the old mobile unit, an obsolete van that was kept in service for 12 years. Last year more than 1,000 patients received their dental care in the mobile unit. Another 2,300 patients accounted for 6,800 visits at WIHD's on-site clinic.

"Our new mobile dental clinic will give us the ability to serve more individuals, provide more consistent, reliable scheduling of visits and better meet the many complex dental needs of the population," said Dr. Susan Fox, president and CEO of WIHD during a special ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The dentist's office on wheels is outfitted with two dental stations, one near the



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTOS

Representatives from the Westchester Institute for Human Development and local officials get ready to cut the ribbon in front of the new mobile dental clinic that was unveiled Aug. 22 in Valhalla.

Left: One of two dental suites that are part of the new mobile dental clinic that was rolled out last week.

front of the bus, another toward the back. It contains the latest equipment and can provide the same range of services as most conventional dental offices, said Dr. Pat Seagriff, the dental director for WIHD.

Seagriff said some people with developmental disabilities are afraid to go to the dentist and there is a lack

of professionals who are familiar with serving people with special needs.

"We all know how important oral health is to our overall health," Seagriff said. "This clinic is a critical component ensuring that individuals with disabilities in the Hudson Valley region receive high quality, consistent and comprehensive oral care."

Money for the mobile clinic and its equipment came from a \$376,826 grant from the Statewide Health Care Facility Transformation Program. A portable hand-held x-ray unit was also donated from the New York State Dental Foundation.

Assemblyman Thomas Abinanti (D-Pleasantville), one of several local state legislators who helped secure the grant money, said if a portion of the population is underserved for a type of service it makes sense to bring it directly to them.

"Why not bring dental services, good quality dental services with skilled people who know how to deal with people with special needs to the people with special needs," said Abinanti, who has two special needs children of his own.

The mobile unit visits community-based agencies throughout the region. It not only brings dental care to the people who need it but it helps decrease patient transportation time and expenses.

The old mobile unit van, which had a projected useful life of about five years, will be serviced and transported to Haiti so it could be used there, said Board of Legislators Chairman Ben Boykin (D-White Plains), who also attended last week's event.