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Mission of Mercy dentists return this weekend, in new location



Dr. Jeffrey Dodge in his Woonsocket dental practice. (Breeze photo by Tom Ward)

By **ETHAN SHOREY**, Valley Breeze Managing Editor

PROVIDENCE – After a one-year hiatus, the Rhode Island Mission of Mercy (RI MOM) Free Dental Clinic, providing dental care to those in need, makes a return this Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 29-30, but in a new location.

The Rhode Island Oral Health Foundation will hold its signature free dental clinic at the Delta Dental of Rhode Island dental clinic at Providence Community Health Centers, 335R Prairie Ave. in Providence. Delta Dental of Rhode Island and Providence Community Health Centers are the event's premier sponsors.

The clinic was previously held at the Community College of Rhode Island Lincoln campus prior to college officials there ending the relationship with the charitable effort.

Organizers of the clinic, who have donated many hours and resources to the cause since it was first founded in 2012, said they're happy to see it return.

"We are looking forward to our sixth Mission of Mercy, and to serving patients in Providence Community Health Centers' state-of-the-art dental clinic," said Dr. Jeffrey Dodge, Mission of Mercy co-chairman and a

Woonsocket dentist. “The Mission of Mercy plays an important role in serving the many patients who need access to oral health care in Rhode Island.”



Dodge told The Breeze he’s moved beyond the circumstances that led to the shutting down of the charitable clinic last year and is excited about the new location after trying his hardest to keep it in Lincoln. He said having it in downtown Providence, near community health centers, presents the opportunity to reach a new walk-in clientele that may not have been able to get to the Lincoln campus.

“We’re quite excited about it,” he said.

Dodge said that Libby Swan, executive director of the Rhode Island Oral Health Foundation, has done a great job of coordinating the extensive logistics involved with holding the event at a new location, including figuring out

parking for the many volunteers needed.

Some drawbacks of moving to Providence are that organizers are starting all over again in setting up a clinic layout that works, he said. Due to the smaller footprint of the facility, tents will be brought in to help accommodate the many patients expected.

The new location will be a little more expensive, with more police details needed and more setup required, said Dodge. In addition to the parking challenges, a city location can also present some issues for people trying to get to an event.

He said the Mission of Mercy remains one of the events Rhode Island should be most proud of for the way it helps those in need.

A year ago, a group of lawmakers lobbied CCRI to allow the Mission of Mercy to return to that college. The Breeze reported in June of last year that officials from the school had ended the Mission of Mercy. Volunteer dentists questioned the decision, saying they were willing to keep running the clinic, but had been forced out of the existing dental health facility at the school.

A representative for the school said at the time that CCRI was willing to offer the school’s field house as an alternative to the dental facility, absorbing \$10,000 in costs, but volunteers said the extra costs to them of setting up a new clinic would be far too expensive, at \$70,000 or higher.

There were suggestions made by mission organizers that some CCRI staffers felt they weren’t getting enough credit for the effort. Dodge said this week that there “may have been some internal politics” going on.

The clinic’s line this weekend will open at 5:45 a.m. (early arrivals are not allowed). Beginning at 7 a.m., patients will be seen based on who’s there first, and the number of patients seen each day will be determined according to clinic capacity. Dental services will include x-rays, oral health instruction, fillings, some root canal treatment on front teeth only, tooth extractions, minor denture repairs, and a limited number of partial dentures to replace missing front teeth.

RI MOM will not provide cleanings, root canals on back (molar) teeth, extractions of impacted wisdom teeth, full dentures, caps (crowns) or teeth whitening.

All clinic services are free for patients. RI MOM is open to those without the financial resources to pay for dental care and to those who do not have a regular dentist. No personal identification or documentation is required, but all patients should bring a list of any current medications they are taking. Interpreters will be available to assist non-English speaking patients.

Delta Dental of Rhode Island has been a premier sponsor of the Mission of Mercy clinic since its inception in 2012. Since then, the free dental clinic has provided care to more than 4,025 patients.

“Our premier sponsorship of the Mission of Mercy clinic is critical to our mission of improving the oral health of all Rhode Islanders,” said Joe Nagle, president & CEO of Delta Dental of Rhode Island. “Many Delta Dental employees look forward to volunteering at RI MOM, and we thank the many participating Delta Dental dentists who give their time and talent to this important event.”

“We look forward to welcoming patients and volunteers into our dental facility,” says Merrill Thomas, CEO for PCHC. “RI MOM is a natural fit with our 50-year history of providing neighborhood-based, accessible primary care and dental care with professionalism, dignity and respect.”

Visit www.rimom.org for more.

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