



Helping Out At Home

Helped by funding from Rotary Club, Dr. Mark Bishara's clinic offers a free open house for its neighbours twice a year



A family affair: Dr. Steve Margolian, Dr. Mark Bishara and Dr. Sheri Margolian.

When Dr. Mark Bishara established his West Bowmanville Family Dental practice “from scratch” in August of 2013, he realized “I’m going to be here for a long time.” The recipient of a gold medal as a top graduate in the University of Western Ontario’s Schulich Medicine & Dentistry Medical Biophysics program in 2006, Mark Bishara went on to study dentistry at UWO, where he met Sheri

Margolian, now his wife. After graduating from the dental program in 2010 and 2013, respectively, they moved to the Whitby area to begin building their careers.

Once settled, Dr. Bishara says, “I wanted to give back to my community,” so, in March 2014, he joined the local Rotary Club. That year, he also inaugurated the first of his practice’s semi-annual free dental days, which are open “on an honour system” to

anyone in need, and are offered with the help of his Rotary Club. “I asked if they could provide funds,” he says, to cover fixed costs such as materials and lab fees, while he would supply his clinical services free of charge. For Dr. Bishara, sharing his skills this way offers personal as well as professional satisfaction. “When I grew up, we didn’t have a lot of money. We didn’t have money for dental care,” he says, “but we’re lucky now.”

Notifications for the free clinics are posted on his dental practice Facebook site, which, he says, is easier and more effective than placing newspaper ads, and the news spreads by word of mouth. Patients are seen on a first-come, first-served basis and the clinic is busy all day. “We have two hygienists and two dentists, and see 50 to 60 patients,” Dr. Bishara says. “Usually people come in with a broken tooth or a problem that’s bothering them. If we can fix it on that visit, we do. We give them a cleaning and a checkup. We can also do an extraction on that day. If they need a more comprehensive cleaning or treatment, such as a root canal or implant, we give them a treatment plan and an estimate, and explain how they can set up a payment plan.”

Some patients first treated on a free day become regular clients, but others



Dr. Mark Bishara with one of his patients from the free dental day.

don't. Dr. Bishara, a father with a young daughter of his own, is sympathetic to the reasons why, especially for parents who put their children first. "They may be out of work or working for minimum wage," he says. "For someone who has kids and no coverage, it's difficult. When you give them an estimate, they may say, 'I just can't do it.'"

Fortunately, aside from helping to support the free dental days, the first \$4,000 donation from Rotary has also allowed Dr. Bishara to treat patients who need further treatment but can't manage the cost. "It's very informal," he says. "Rotary gave me control of the choices. 'We trust you to make a judgement call on who would benefit,' they said."

Mike Jones, now a father of four who then worked part-time, was one of the first recipients. Jones needed surgery, then implants, to restore missing upper molars. "For a young patient under 30, the idea of living with a denture for life becomes a

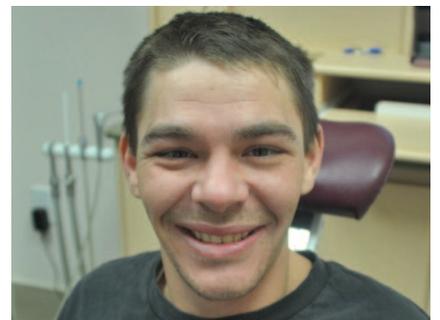
challenge," Dr. Bishara says. With \$2,500 from Rotary, a reduced fee from Dr. Bishara's colleague, Toronto lab technician Nikolay Romanovsky, and "five to six hours in the chair," Dr. Bishara says, "we gave him back his back teeth."

Jones couldn't be happier. "I'm a friendly-type guy, but I never used to smile," he said, explaining that he'd been too self-conscious about his mouth and appearance. The dental work "makes my face look better and I'm actually smiling more," Jones says, and adds that his doctor is pleased with the benefit to his overall health. "I was losing weight, drastically. I can eat normal foods, like meat, for the first time in years, and I'm gaining weight," Jones says, "but the best part is that the pain is gone." He plans to make regular dental checkups a part of his children's health care, so the benefits of his experience will even extend to the next generation. "Dr. Bishara took care of me," Jones says, "so I can take care of

the rest of them."

While Dr. Bishara spends most of his time at the Bowmanville clinic, Dr. Margolian usually works at the Margolian Dentistry clinic in nearby Whitby, alongside her father, Dr. Steve Margolian, but the three also switch clinics and chairsides, to perform specific procedures. And, as of last November, Drs. Bishara, Margolian and Margolian also began offering an annual free dental day at both the Whitby clinic and at a clinic in nearby Brooklin. Mark Bishara says it's all a great way to be good to his neighbours. "For me, the big thing is that I know I'm going to be in the area for a long time, so it's nice for me to know I can help them out." 

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A very happy patient: Mike Jones with the new smile that changed his life.