

Whiter smile can help at a children's hospital

Dentists bleach teeth, donate proceeds.

By Pauline Plazard Hooper
INSPIRED BY A VISIT TO

More than a dozen dentists in the greater Philadelphia area — about 600 across North America — are smiling wide at the expectation of raising a whopping \$3 million during a four-month tooth-whitening benefit called "Smiles for Life." All of the money will go to St. Jude Research Hospital in Memphis.

"Everybody wins with this," said Buzz Walexton, a participating Smiles dentist who lives and practices in Wallingford.

Until May 31, patients can get their teeth cosmetically brightened by donating \$150 to \$200, depending on the area, to the Smiles for Life Foundation. Dentists are donating their time, office and personnel to this ef-

fort. In 1998, the program's first year, 400 participating Smiles dentists whitened the teeth of 2,643 U.S. and Canadian patients. The goal was to raise \$1 million, but they exceeded expectations and collected \$1.5 million for the Tennessee hospital.

Nowtown dentist Robert Lantry performed 25 tooth-whitening procedures last year for Smiles. He said four visits are involved in the four- to six-week procedure. An impression of the upper and lower teeth is created for a month tray, which fits the teeth. Patients pour a bleaching liquid into the tray and bathe the teeth for a prescribed amount of time.

"After the first couple of days, some pe-

See DENTIST on M2



Fitting patient Linda Heffernan with the mouth trays, Bettyanne Foley, Wallingford dentist Buzz Waterston's assistant, instructs her in the whitening process.

How a whiter smile can help a children's hospital

DENTIST from M21

lients notice whitening immediately," Lantry said, adding that the procedure was "very popular. People are getting teeth whitened for a good cause. I've had a lot of positive feedback by participants."

Waterston patient Mounreen Maloy of Wallingford, currently in the tooth-whitening process, had not realized teeth could be whitened. She read an article about Waterston and the Smiles program and decided to try it out.

"To be honest, I probably would not have done this," said Maloy, who contributed \$50 more than the recommended \$150. "I'm not a model or actress. I'm a lawyer and a mom with two children. I was very touched that he did this for chari-

ty."

Sponsored by the Salt Lake City-based Crown Council, a four-year-old dental group working for the betterment of patients and community, the Smiles idea was suggested by California dentist Jeff Gray at the council's 1998 annual meeting. The council says the procedure normally costs about \$350. Massachusetts dentist Ron Plotka proposed giving the money St. Jude

Plotka, 55, who is of Lebanese descent, grew up in Atlantic City. He was 11 years old, working as a Steeplechase Pier concessionaire, when he met entertainer Danny Thomas. "I saw him and ran up and told him I was Lebanese. I told him my mother made Lebanese food and would make some for him."

From the meeting, Plotka became friends with Thomas, who founded St. Jude in 1962. "He told me, 'Some day, kid, when you get older and become successful, I want you to help me with the hospital.'"

St. Jude, a childhood-cancer research center, researches cures for cancer, AIDS and sickle-cell anemia. Since its founding 37 years ago, more than 15,000 youngsters from the United States and 60 other countries have been treated at no cost to the families.

The council asked Discus Dental Inc. about supplying dental-whitening kits at a reduced price. Instead, the Culver City, Calif., company donated \$1 million worth of kits in 1998 and this year.

Lafayette Hill dentist Michael Sil-

berman is president of the Philadelphia chapter of the Crown Council. "We felt dentists needed a like-minded group to come together and share ideas on how to improve the lives of patients; their team members and community," said Silverman, who treated 80 patients through Smiles in 1998. "It's an opportunity for all of us to give back."

Council members have seen results not only in their patients' whiter teeth, but in the children served by St. Jude. Silverman first met a St. Jude patient named Tlana at a council meeting. Because of cancer treatment, she had lost her hair and was wearing a mask. He saw her again in July 1998. "She had on a pink dress, her hair had grown back and she had no mask. We were all crying [from happiness] for her."

He said the tooth-whitening process was sometimes tedious. "Sometimes I wonder: 'Why am I doing this? Then I think of this little girl, Tlana, and it all becomes worthwhile. There's not a single regret when you think of these kids.'"