



Registered Dentist Assistant Vanessa Medina works with an H.A. Hyde second-grader during an in-school visit from Dientes Community Dental Care's Outreach Program Tuesday. - Tony Nuñez/The Pajaronian

Local News

Dientes continues to expand in Watsonville

By: **TONY NUÑEZ** 📅 November 1, 2019

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WATSONVILLE – The average trick or treater consumes roughly 3 cups of sugar on Halloween, according to data collected by CouponFollow in 2013. That's the equivalent of 220 sugar packets, and 16 times the daily recommendation of 25 grams suggested by the American Heart Association.

Dientes Community Dental Care on Tuesday provided some preventive oral health care for roughly 30 H.A. Hyde Elementary School students in advance of Thursday's sugar-packed Holiday.

The in-school visit was part of the organization's Outreach Program, which aims to eliminate transportation as a barrier to visit the dentist by bringing the care into the classroom of 22 elementary schools throughout Santa Cruz County.

Thirteen of those schools are located in Pajaro Valley Unified School District, an area in which Dientes has steadily expanded its reach over the last year. They've added five elementary schools – Bradley, Hall District, Mintie White, Radcliff and T.S. MacQuiddy – from PVUSD, and also recently branched out to older students by taking the program to Sequoia High School, an alternative education school off Green Valley Road opened in 2016.

"It's a population that a lot of people have kind of written off and those administrators haven't," Nicole Mello, outreach program manager, said about the expansion to Sequoia. "It really pushes our mission of serving the underserved and sometimes forgotten. We want to make sure they get the same resources as everybody else."

Mello said Dientes hopes to expand into more secondary schools in the future.

The Outreach Program brings the dentist chair to the classroom to provide participating students with a routine exam and cleaning, as well as fluoride treatment and X-rays.

Mello said that more than 30 percent of children in the county have never been to the dentist. Dientes hopes the in-school visits can steadily lower that number by educating both kids and parents about the importance of oral health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, dental decay is the single most common childhood disease – four times more common than asthma. A simple exam, Mello said, can change the trajectory of a kid’s long-term health.

“People probably don’t think this is super helpful, but the little things add up,” Mello said.

Dentist Hannah Mixer echoed Mello saying that a healthy mouth has larger impacts on the child’s overall health.

“Their teeth are part of their overall health that’s going to be impacting their ability to eat well, sleep well, to function well at home and in school,” Mixer said. “It also impacts their self-esteem – their ability to speak and smile. It’s incredibly important, even if it’s a small component.”



TONY NUÑEZ

MANAGING EDITOR TONY NUÑEZ IS A LONGTIME MEMBER OF THE WATSONVILLE COMMUNITY WHO SERVED AS SPORTS EDITOR FOR FIVE YEARS BEFORE ENTERING HIS CURRENT ROLE IN 2019. A WATSONVILLE HIGH, CABRILLO COLLEGE AND SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY ALUMNUS, HE COVERS THE CITY, BUSINESS, HOUSING, ENTERTAINMENT AND MORE.



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