**Press Release**

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| **For Immediate Release:**  August 3, 2021 | **Contact:** Sheree Storm  sstorm@dientes.org, 831-600-8256 |

**Dientes’ Clinic Celebrates Six Years in Watsonville**

1,800 Patients in Need Benefit from Local Dental Care Every Year

(Santa Cruz, CA) It took four years of hard work from concept to completion but on August 3, 2015, Dientes took a major step in addressing the need for affordable oral healthcare for South County residents by opening a new 4-chair dental center. Fast forward six years and over 1,800 adults and children per year are receiving high quality, comprehensive dental services in Dientes’ Watsonville clinic on Freedom Boulevard, by a dedicated bi-lingual staff. During this time there have been high points -- like expanding hygiene services by adding a 5th chair, growing dental services for children, and adding special equipment like a Panorex for more comprehensive treatment planning, and then the lowest point, when COVID-19 shut the clinic down except for emergency care for eight weeks in 2020.

*“The need for dental care for Medi-Cal recipients and those without insurance is great. Many of our 11,000 patients and staff are in Watsonville and when we had an opportunity to expand access to care, address transportation as a barrier, and reduce commute time, we were happy to partner with the County of Santa Cruz,”* commented Dientes Chief Executive Officer Laura Marcus on why the clinic was established.

Caralyn Reed is thankful for the clinic in Watsonville because she no longer drives and it is close to where she lives. Caralyn says that social security payments aren’t even enough to cover her rent—let alone food, transportation, medical bills, and dental care. She has lived in Santa Cruz County for 50 years and was a licensed nurse for convalescent homes for many of those years.

*“I never planned on going out like this—but none of us do. No one plans on being poor, especially me. I had a good education, but we all have surprises along the way. But just because I’m low-income now, shouldn’t mean I struggle to get healthcare.”*

Though life has had its difficulties for Caralyn, she says that her dental care has been one thing she hasn’t had to worry about as a patient on Medi-Cal. *“I wouldn’t have any teeth or the ability to eat if it weren’t for Dientes. They made a dramatic difference in my life and in my ability to keep my health.”* Though Caralyn’s situation is unique—she is a senior but still eligible for Medi-Cal—she also knows how difficult it is for her senior peers to find dental care without dental benefits part of Medicare. *“That’s another reason I’m grateful: that there were people out there who thought about those needs. See these pretty teeth?” she says and smiles, “They were made here.”*

Dientes is known for providing an exceptional level of care that takes the apprehension out of going to the dentist. The staff work hard to build trust with patients, making people who haven’t seen a dentist in a very long time feel comfortable and safe. The Watsonville clinic is no exception.

At the celebration, Dientes Chief Development Officer Sheree Storm commented, *“We couldn’t be more thrilled to be providing quality dentistry in the heart of the Pajaro Valley. We know there is an overwhelming demand for more affordable dental care, and we are grateful for the support of our community and the strong partnerships that help address that need.”*

The clinic in Watsonville represents just one of the successful partnerships between Dientes and the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency and Clinics, integrating primary and dental care services under one roof. Dientes also provides dental services to County patients through their Beach Flats and Commercial Way locations as well as on the Housing Matters campus and at outreach sites across the County.

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*Photos: Watsonville Clinic Celebration 8/3/2021*

*Dientes Community Dental Care’s mission is to create lasting oral health for the underserved children and adults in Santa Cruz County and neighboring communities. 96% of Dientes’ patients live at or below the poverty level. Dientes accepts Medi-Cal and offers sliding scale fees for uninsured patients.*