

SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEERISM

Recently SBVCDS contacted member, John Graser, to “get the Skinny” on a new project we’ve been hearing about at the Conejo Free Clinic (www.conejofreeclinic.org), a community-based, non-profit organization providing free medical and legal services, and soon, dental services.

SBVCDS: John, how did you get involved in this project?

My involvement in this wonderful project is the culmination of four generations of doctors Graeser plus something that fell in my lap quite by accident. In my family there have been 3 physicians in the older generations, back to my great grandfather, and 3 dentists in the younger generations. My father George Graeser was a practicing Orthodontist in Ventura and Oxnard for 30 years. My practice in Oxnard has lasted 47 years.

My dental practice was sold in 2014, at which time I thought I needed to find a way to utilize the knowledge gained in those years of practice to help members of the community where I lived. Over my practice lifetime, there have been too many stories of dentists who, for numerous reasons, found retirement to be unfulfilling, and were for the most part bored. My aim has always been to have an activity in which I can participate when my technical skills decline. The Conejo Free Clinic in Thousand Oaks has been that happy accident.

My Darlene and I have spent our lives turning our home into a colorful, beautiful, joyful, functioning piece of art. We have invited many groups to use our home to raise funds for their charitable work. We have hosted the City of Thousand Oaks, the Westlake Garden Club, several other service clubs, Charter Schools, the Cancer Wellness Community and most recently the Community Conscious organization. My wife is both a Clinical Psychologist and very accomplished artist. She arranges these events for all those who appreciate art to come and enjoy what she calls our “Crayon Box.” It was at the conclusion of the last event with Community Conscious that I became involved in the Conejo Free Dental Clinic.

Community Conscious houses at least a dozen charities in their building on Hillcrest Drive, one of which is the Free Medical Clinic, which has been in existence for 30 years. At their annual fund raiser, tours of our home were auctioned. Those that bid on the home tour knew that “Brillig Manor” was the home of the Drs. Graeser, but did not know that I was a dentist. At the conclusion of the tour I was speaking with one of the participants who was a member of the Community Conscious Board. She informed me that a space became available in their building and they were thinking of putting in a dental clinic, but “did not know what to do.” Without hesitation, I told her that I would be willing to help, and at that moment became the clinic



Teresa Seeley, Executive Director of the Conejo Free Clinic, and SBVCDS member and community volunteer, John Graeser, DDS, reviewing plans for the new dental suite.

director. After being put in touch with the Executive Director, Teresa Seeley, and her wonderful staff, we began work on creating a brand new dental clinic.

SBVCDS: Tell us about the clinic plans:

The new Conejo Free Dental Clinic will be a just about state-of-the-art dental suite. Thus far, we have worked with Patterson, Henry Schein and DenMat to create our vision. All of the design will be modern and all the new equipment and computers will be the best available in hopes of attracting as many good, caring dental personnel as possible. Our clinic has 2 fully-equipped operatories. Currently we are searching for just the right person to be a part-time clinic manager with the skills of an RDA, business office, and can train volunteers on proper clinic procedures.

SBVCDS: What is the intended patient population?

We will treat the same population as the medical clinic. There is an entire population of people who we all meet every day outside our offices who have jobs and families, but without the means to afford medical and dental care. They may not be “down and out,” but they are struggling to keep a roof over their head, and are either uninsured or under-insured.

SBVCDS: What kind of services will be offered?

Our current plan will be to begin slowly, to be open 2 days a week, at first, until we get our systems in place and enough staff and volunteers to fully man the clinic. We want to treat patients individually, and will initially provide basic procedures such as preventive care, fillings, stainless steel crowns, simple extractions, acrylic flippers, etc. Eventually, I want to institute a program of dentures in-a-day, much like is done at the CDA Cares (www.cdafoundation.org/cda-cares) events. We will need to bring a

laboratory on board in the near future. There is much work to do and we welcome the participation of the entire dental team: dentists, hygienists, assistants, and front office. The ultimate goal is to have each volunteer in the clinic for 4 hours, one day per month, to keep the time commitment joyful, rather than burdensome.

This organization is unique in many ways. One of which is the voucher system for dentists who will occasionally perform certain procedures in their own office at no or minimal charge. Another unique quality is the way patients are treated. There will be a simple medical evaluation, screening for diabetes, blood pressure, and oral cancer, before dentistry commences. Patients are treated on a case by case basis, just as in the Medical clinic, and services are not restricted to residents of Thousand Oaks.

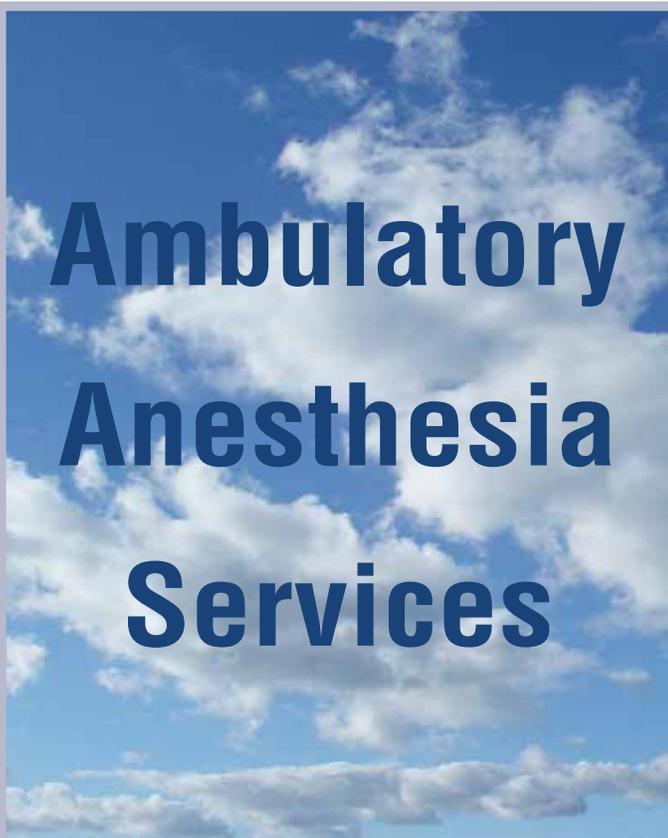
SBVCDS: Is there anything else you would like to say to the membership?

Yes, please volunteer and let your staffs know about this great opportunity to help in a way that no one else but dental people can. Just click on the Volunteer button at conejofreeclinic.org and download the form. We hope to open by August 1. I will certainly keep the dental society apprised!

SBVCDS: Thank you for this interview, and for your service here, as well. Our members never cease to amaze us. We look forward to hearing more about the Conejo Free Clinic.



John Graeser, dentist and muse, poses for the portrait "Adventures of Napman" by his wife Darlene.



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