

June 4

Have Mercy

Two days, hundreds of volunteers and thousands of procedures – that’s the incredible feat pulled off each year at the Rhode Island Mission of Mercy dental clinic. Sponsored by the Rhode Island Oral Health Foundation non-profit, in conjunction with Delta Dental, the Community College of Rhode Island, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island and other generous supporters, the Mission of Mercy clinic provides free dental care to the uninsured, underinsured, or anyone who cannot access dental care. The CCRI Lincoln campus is transformed into a temporary clinic, complete with dental chairs, digital radiography, a sterilization center and electronic dental records. Services include cleanings, fluoride treatments, x-rays, tooth extractions, root canals and much more, provided by dental and medical volunteers. Community volunteers, many coming from the sponsoring companies, also provide administrative support, get patients checked in and help ensure the day runs smoothly.

To see an enormous crowd lining up to receive these services is overwhelming. Mission of Mercy fills a huge need in our community, and many Rhode Islanders rely on the availability of this free service. Volunteers encounter patients who are in pain, but have been unable to afford professional dental care. This weekend clinic makes all the difference for them. Without this, they would continue to suffer.

No one is compensated for their work that day, and yet when I spoke to volunteers it seemed like many of them get more out of the experience than the patients. That has certainly been the takeaway from Rhode Island Oral Health Foundation President, Dr. Jeffrey Dodge. Mission of Mercy has been a labor of love for Dr. Dodge, and thanks to him and the hundreds of men and women who freely give their weekend for the cause, Rhode Islanders have a reason to smile.

