

Diesel dentist coming to Garberville and Afghanistan

The first time dentist James Rolfe went to Afghanistan to offer free dentistry in a country desperately in need, he says he felt "like a raindrop in the desert." But he refused to be discouraged and kept going back. This spring he's bringing some "rain" from southern Humboldt County in the form of a low-cost diesel generator that will power a complete dental clinic to be shipped to Afghanistan in May. Jim Rolfe will recount his personal journey to become a "diesel dentist" offering humanitarian aid to the poorest residents of that war-torn nation in a presentation on Saturday, April 30, at the Garberville Vets Hall.

Jim Rolfe had been a dentist practicing in Santa Barbara for 36 years when he read a newspaper story about the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. After the wars fought there for more than 25 years with Soviet, American, and eventually Middle Eastern weapons and money, none of the war sponsors was paying for peace. There were "zero dental facilities for most Afghans. Nothing. I thought, hey, I can help."

So he loaded up some supplies and set up a clinic in the capital city of Kabul, where he was overwhelmed with the need he saw. "It was beyond my comprehension" he said, "that a country of 27 million people would be able to exist without dentistry." So he went to work on mothers and children who had never seen a dentist in their lives. He saw "tartar deposits built up between teeth and under gums until you can hardly see the teeth." Under the tarter, teeth decay and fall apart, the remains becoming chronically infected gum abscesses. It was a seemingly overwhelming challenge, but a means of progress came in a flash. "A child would come in and get treatment, I'd have that child become my assistant, and I'd get a

new child to treat. I realized I could teach these orphan kids to be dental technicians!"

He arranged for local sponsorship from a Kabul orphanage, and created the Afghanistan Dental Relief Project to train a new generation of hygienists and dental workers to fan out across Afghanistan. To jump-start the facility, he constructed a complete six-bay dental clinic fitted inside a shipping container, which he plans to park in the orphanage yard and get right to business. A second container is filled with long-term supplies.

Only one thing was missing: power to run his dental equipment. Municipal electricity is a distant memory, even in Afghanistan's capital, so Dr. Rolfe had to rig his own freestanding power source for the compressors and motors that make modern dentistry work well. A SoHum resident heard of his plight and contacted Estelle Fennel at KMUD news. The morning after her news feature on Dr. Rolfe, a generator was offered at the very low price of \$1,500 for the relief effort. Dazey's Supply donated a once-over for the generator to ensure it was up

to the job. "This means we can hit the ground running when we get to Afghanistan," Rolfe said. "I'm very happy for what it will mean for the women and orphans of Kabul."

Dr. Jim Rolfe is driving his pick-up to Garberville this weekend to get the generator, and to present a slide show on his experiences of "diesel dentistry" and the continuing collateral damage of proxy warfare. He'll discuss opportunities to help his humanitarian mission, including web-work and adventure travel, and he'll pass the hat to raise that \$1,500.

Please come to the Garberville

Veterans Hall at 483 Conger Street this Saturday, April 30, at 6 p.m. for an informal potluck chat with Jim about his work, followed by his slide show and discussion at 8 p.m.

If you would like to help the effort but cannot come to meet Dr. Rolfe and hear his presentation, you can make a donation through Community Credit Union account #12055. For more information on this event and the fundraising efforts, call 923-1440. To learn about the Afghan Dental Relief Project, visit www.adrpinc.org. Let it rain!

Submitted by Charley Custer



Dr. James Rolfe, the "diesel dentist," with an Afghani orphan who has just received dental care at the clinic in Kabul in 2004. Dr. Rolfe will discuss his work in Afghanistan at the Garberville Veteran's building this Saturday, April 30, beginning with a potluck at 6 p.m.



Dr. James Rolfe (right), the "diesel dentist," works on an Afghani woman at the dental clinic in Kabul in 2004. Dr. Rolfe will discuss his work in Afghanistan at the Garberville Veteran's building this Saturday, April 30, beginning with a potluck at 6 p.m..