

Noushin Torabian, Dr. Rolfe's Iranian-born dental assistant, will translate for the group, which will stay with family she has in the country. The travelers will have a driver and at least one armed guard.

"We are trying to help some kids bond with Americans," Ms. Torabian said. "Otherwise they are going to hate us and become terrorists. We need to really do something. I hope the community of Santa Barbara realizes that to help us."

Mr. Benavides, 24, said he hopes to stay involved with Dr. Rolfe through more than one trip and eventually finish a full-length documentary on the project.

"This time we are going to set up a lot of stuff," Mr. Benavides said. "Hopefully next time we will start building." His interest also is personal. "I'd like to see the place," Mr. Benavides said. "There has been so much going on there. You hear things on TV all the time. I'd kind of like to go over there and see for myself, firsthand, what the situation is. I sympathize with the people, who I know are having a hard time. That's why I'd like to contribute to this project, so we can help them out."

Dr. Rolfe will clean some teeth while he is overseas—his patients will sit atop a lightweight travel exam chair he built from plywood—then put nearly all his equipment in storage until he returns to Afghanistan, perhaps in October.

He will depart from Kabul on June 2, then travel to Iran for a couple of days to acquire dentistry textbooks written in Farsi for use by Afghan students. Dr. Rolfe and companions are scheduled to return to Santa Barbara on June 5.

A native of Boise, Idaho, Dr. Rolfe came to Santa Barbara County in 1974 as a member of the Sumburst Commune and worked as the dentist there. He left the commune in 1982, set up shop in Santa Barbara and has operated a private practice since.

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GET INVOLVED

The Afghanistan Dental Relief Project will hold a silent auction and benefit concert featuring Nuevo Flamenco performer Roni Benise at 8 p.m. Friday at the Lobero Theatre. Tickets start at \$30. For more information, call 963-0761 or 963-2329.

To make a donation, call 963-2329 or send a check to the Afghanistan Dental Relief Project, P.O. Box 734, Santa Barbara 93102.

Trip may leave lasting impression

Group heads to Afghanistan to lay foundation for dental clinic

By **THOMAS SCHULTZ**
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

Santa Barbara dentist James Rolfe plans to do more than clean teeth on his second trip to Afghanistan.

Accompanied by four adventurous helpers, including two who will document the trip, the longtime tooth doctor will move from meeting to meeting in Kabul to lay the groundwork for a permanent dental clinic and technician education facility there.

"There is so much need," Dr. Rolfe, 64, said this week

between appointments at his Canon Perdido Street office near the Lobero Theatre. "We're really trying to go beyond the basic need, to lift these people there out of the depths of their social situation."

Although fighting has flared recently near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the two-week trip starting May 14 comes amid a relative calm in the capital city of Kabul. Still, anti-American sentiment and anarchy constantly threaten travelers' safety.

Please see **AFGHANISTAN** on **A10**



STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS

Dr. James Rolfe, right, is taking a diverse group with him to Afghanistan. Among those going are, from left, SBCC videographer Karlos Benavides, yoga instructor Hayley Parlen and Noushin Torabian, Dr. Rolfe's Iranian-born dental assistant and now his translator.

Dentists few, far between in country

■ **AFGHANISTAN**
Continued from Page A1

The trip is significant because Afghanistan has few dentists, and those who are there work without the latest technology. When Dr. Rolfe traveled to the country's Wardak Province in October to treat 40 or so orphan boys, he visited a region without any access to dental care, he said.

Although a success on its own merits, that October trip in which he founded his nonprofit Afghanistan Dental Relief Project—inspired by his concern that Americans would abandon promises to help Afghanistan—had a downside.

"I just worked like crazy, and it didn't really make much of a difference," Dr. Rolfe said. With an estimated 2,000 orphans in Kabul alone, "I wouldn't be able to make a dent."

So his strategy is broader now.

Next week, Dr. Rolfe will ship enough equipment to construct two dental labs and perform complex surgeries—enough gear to do every procedure he offers to patients in Santa Barbara.

The \$10,000 shipment will include two 70-pound transformers for electricity and 1,000 pairs of donated shoes for orphans, half that amount contributed by students at Adams School.

By this week, Dr. Rolfe and his entourage had raised about \$5,000 to cover the shipment cost. Participants will pay their own way, at an estimated cost of \$3,000 per person.

With help from orphanage managers and authorities at the Afghan Ministry of Health, Dr. Rolfe's primary goal is to find a suitable site to build a permanent clinic. Eventually, he said, volunteer dentists contacted through the American Dental Association would visit the facility and donate their time and knowledge.

The association has a list of dentists interested in going to Afghanistan, Dr. Rolfe said, but there currently is nowhere for them to stay.

Accompanying Dr. Rolfe are Karlos Benavides, a Santa Barbara City College student videographer; Kelly Marshall, a recent Brooks Institute of Photography graduate who now lives in New York City; and Santa Barbara resident Hayley Parlen, who teaches yoga to children.