

PEOPLE

Holding out HOPE



Photo courtesy of Jim Rolfe
The children at this orphanage in Kabul would be among the recipients if Jim Rolfe (not pictured) gets his clinic up.



Juan Carlo / Star staff
Dental assistant Maribel Guevara, left, helps Dr. Jim Rolfe as he works on a patient's porcelain crown Friday at his dental practice in Santa Barbara. Rolfe recently returned from Afghanistan, where he is trying to set up a dental office so he and others can offer aid to the Afghan people. So far his efforts have been thwarted, but he remains resolved.

Dentist determined to help people of Afghanistan

By Kim Lamb Gregory
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Santa Barbara dentist's attempt to bring free dental care and education to the poor of Afghanistan was met with sticks, rubber hoses and red tape, but Jim Rolfe, D.D.S., is not deterred.

"I'm obsessed," said Rolfe, 67, who is now back from his visit to Afghanistan. "This has become the focal point of my life and I'm determined to do this."

After spending a year and about \$200,000 of his own money to create a mobile dental clinic out of two shipping crates, Rolfe paid to have the homemade clinic shipped to Afghanistan on June 18. His plan was to follow the crate to Afghanistan in July, set up the clinic in Kabul and offer disadvantaged citizens free dental care. He also planned to set up a classroom to train interested Afghan students in dental technology.

It's a plan that has consumed Rolfe since he visited Afghanistan in 2002 to volunteer his dental services to an orphanage. He saw mouth after mouth filled with abscessed roots, missing teeth and swollen cherry-red gums. Many had never heard of a toothbrush.

"People can die from abscessed teeth," Rolfe pointed out.

In 2003, he founded a nonprofit organization called the Afghanistan Dental Relief Project, which was aimed at creating a permanent dental facility in Kabul, where he and other dentists could regularly donate their skills.

Rolfe had help from volunteers and monetary commitments from businesses in both Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, but he did the



Courtesy of Jim Rolfe

Jim Rolfe said he believes the United States needs to help Afghanistan rebuild its infrastructure. "Most of Kabul is without water and electricity," he said.

In order to afford this venture, Rolfe, who is divorced, lives about \$7,000 below the federal poverty line in a city of BMWs and multimillion-dollar homes. He drives a motorcycle, lives in a \$500-a-month condo, and hauls his construction materials in a 1962 GMC truck with more than 200,000 miles on it.

fit in sleeping and eating whenever he could. Sometimes the tooth decay warrior admittedly wound up dining on candy, when he didn't have time for dinner.

His weariness sometimes caused accidents in the Santa Barbara shipping yard where he did everything from installing drywall to hooking