

# OPEN WIDE!

## Local dentist 'brushes up' youngsters on hygiene

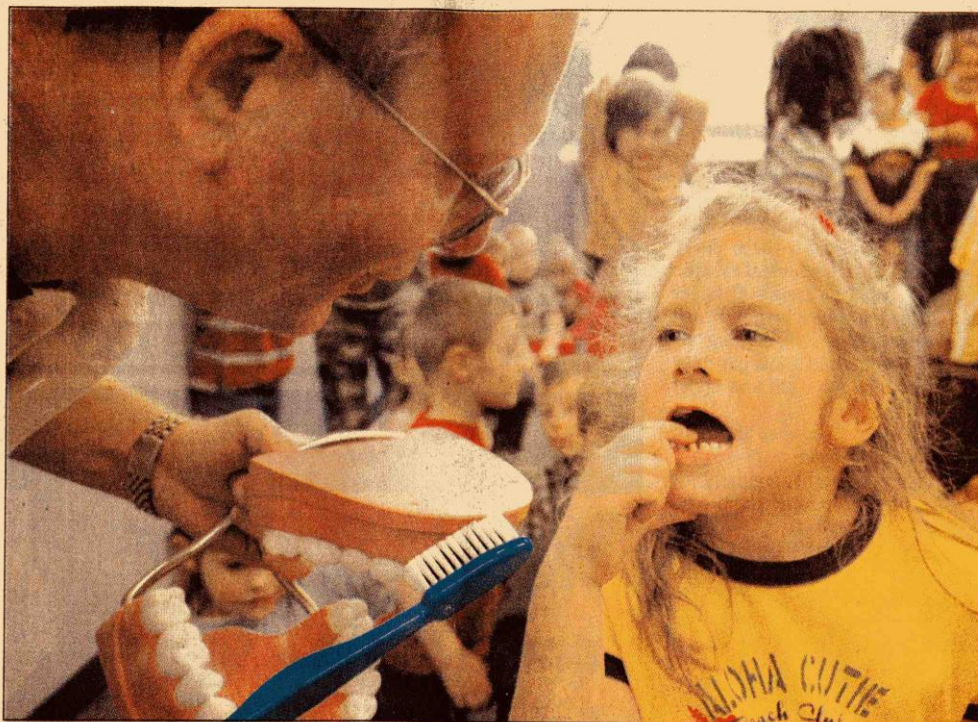
By KELLEY LANNIGAN  
Press Staff

Against a cheerful backdrop of painted blue sky, white clouds, yellow sun, trees, flowers and butterflies, Dr. George Weeks talked to students at the PreK Center about the importance of good oral hygiene.

Prior to the program held last Friday morning, Dr. Weeks could be seen in the hallway joking and laughing with the children as they moved from one classroom to another.

In front of an enthusiastic group of preK and kindergarten students, he demonstrated the correct way to brush using a giant toothbrush and huge pair of plastic teeth.

"Always move from the top



Following a program about the benefits of good dental hygiene, six year old Jaice Williams shares the loss of her first baby tooth with dentist George Weeks.

Photo by Kelley Lannigan

of your teeth to the bottom and back up again," Dr. Weeks told his young audience. "Never just scrub side to side. Don't forget to brush your tongue, too. Don't share your toothbrush with anyone. Brush at least two minutes. Three is best."

"And if you don't brush," Dr Weeks cautioned, "this can happen!" He whacked himself a few times on the backside with the giant toothbrush. "Ow!" he cried,

causing the kids to break into squeals of laughter.

But the good doctor's message is also serious. "You must brush," he told the children, "especially after a sugary snack. And never, never, never go to bed without brushing those teeth. That's when tooth decay really does its dirty work."

Dr. Weeks and his staff have been presenting dental health programs to young school children for 28 years.

The program arose from his concern for the amount of tooth decay he saw when he began his dental practice in Macclenny in the 70's.

"So many of the older folks had lost all their teeth and used dentures," he said. "When you have dentures, the ability to chew food adequately is only about 15% that of real teeth. So you end up eating mostly pureed food. That's not very enjoyable.

"And I saw so many young children with terrible tooth decay, I felt I had to take dental education out into the public arena. I thought what better way than in the school system so they could get the message when they are young."

A puppet show features common-sense characters such as Harry Healthytooth and Apple Annie who try to caution the careless Suzy Sweettooth from falling prey to the cavity encouraging influence of Lollipop Pete.

An animated video called Geena's Tremendous Tooth Adventure, featuring talking giraffes, hippos and an evil ape also reinforced the benefits of tooth brushing, good choices of healthy snacks and frequent checkups at the dentist's office.

Afterwards, teachers were given toothbrushes and sugar-free lollipops to pass out to their

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students before they went home for the day.

Dr. Weeks' winning manner, clear instructions and creative program got the message across. Teachers reported that after the program, some children were waiting before eating their morning snacks.

"Are these OK for our teeth?" they wanted to know.

The American Dental Association recommends the following for good oral hygiene:

- Brush your teeth twice a day with an ADA-accepted fluoride toothpaste.

- Clean between teeth daily with floss or an interdental cleaner. Decay-causing bacteria still linger between teeth where toothbrush bristles can't reach. Flossing removes plaque and food particles from between the teeth and under the gum line.

- Eat a balanced diet and limit between-meal snacks.

- Visit your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and oral exams.

- Replace toothbrushes every three months or sooner if the bristles become frayed. A worn toothbrush will not do a good job of cleaning teeth. Replace children's toothbrushes more frequently as they wear out sooner.