

This week's Muskoka Mosaic: Introducing Sarah Smith

By Paula Boon

Sarah Smith's mission is to help people achieve better oral health.

Since May 2008, the dental hygienist from Utterson has been offering mobile services to the people of Muskoka.

Smith sees her business, Gentle Dental, as a community service. Her house calls are typically scheduled so there is lots of time to go at the clients' own pace – even if that includes chatting over a cup of tea. "Sometimes when you go to seniors' homes, you're the highlight of their week. You're a visitor," she explains. "I'm passionate about my business and my clients."

A full-time employee of Dr. Doug Raynor, Smith provides her mobile service on days off, evenings and weekends.

Smith provides a full range of dental hygiene services, including teeth whitening, denture care and making sports guards. "I want to help people overcome the challenges of getting to the office, whether they are physical, personal or financial," she says, emphasizing that she welcomes people on the Ontario Disability Support Program.

While Gentle Dental is for anyone and everyone, Smith specializes in the elderly and people with special needs. She visits nursing homes once a week and especially likes caring for patients with advanced Alzheimer's disease. "It takes a lot of patience, but when I look in their eyes they have so much love," she says. "Even though they might not be able to remember, they still have feelings. They're still valuable citizens."

Smith says the name Gentle Dental applies to both her personality and her style of work. "I'm gentle in implementing my care and in my approach to people," she says.

She recognizes that many of her clients feel nervous because of unpleasant memories. "Your first experience in a dental office can affect you for the rest of your life," says Smith.

As a result, she finds out ahead of time whether people have ever had an upsetting experience in a dental office. "I always tell people what I am going to do and have their consent before I start," she says.

"Everything I do is individualized. No two people are the same."

Smith is constantly maintaining her professional development and upholding the standards and regulations set by the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario.

In April 2009, she won the Muskoka Outstanding Women in Business Young Entrepreneur of the Year award in recognition of the work she has done through Gentle Dental.

Smith, who grew up in the area, did a co-op in dental assisting before graduating from Huntsville High School in 2000. She then went to Canadore College in North Bay to study dental assisting and worked for one year before returning to school. Smith graduated from Fanshawe College in London with a dental hygiene diploma in 2003.

The next year, she married her high school sweetheart, Sean Smith, and their daughter Ariana was born in 2005.

In her free time, Smith likes spending time with her daughter, boating, hiking, doing outside work, and spending time in the summer at Port Sydney beach. "Family's really important to us. It's the backbone of life," she says.

Smith has travelled to developing countries such as Honduras and the Dominican Republic, each time with numerous toothbrushes to hand out. Someday she hopes to take part in a mobile dental mission, but something like that takes a great deal of planning and preparation, so for now, she is keeping her charitable work closer to home.

On the first Friday of December last year when some dentists in the area offered a free dental day, she did too. "I plan to do it again. I had an overwhelming response," she says.

In fact, serving all the people who requested her services took her into February.

"But I honoured their requests," says Smith. "This year I'm going to be more prepared, get more hygienists on board. Helping others is my greatest joy."

Thanks to Terry Smith for suggesting that Sarah Smith be profiled. To explore the complete collection of Muskoka Mosaic profiles, go to www.thelifecollector.com.



SERVICE WITH A SMILE: Sarah Smith prepares her tools before seeing a client at a local nursing home. Her business, Gentle Dental, offers mobile dental hygiene services.

David Suzuki to speak at national conference in Huntsville next month

Renowned geneticist, award-winning scientist, environmentalist and broadcaster David Suzuki will bring his message of environmental stewardship to educators at the National Character Education Conference in Huntsville next month.

An author and world leader in sustainable ecology, Suzuki is also known for his commitment to education, and particularly to young people.

"We are very proud that Dr. Suzuki is able to be a part of this year's conference," said conference co-chair and principal of Huntsville High School Jan Olsson. "His message brings into focus a new and very current dimension of character education. We are very excited to share that with not just our educators, but for our community partners and parents as well." Conference organizers have made available 100 seats for public attendees, he said.

"We just feel that the message this year is meaningful to so many people," Olsson said.

The idea, he added, began at the high school, where he has watched students and teachers grow their dedication to environmental responsibility. Students are drawn to protection of the environment, Olsson said.

"Environmental stewardship has become a driving force for many of our young people. The connections to character education — in terms of perseverance, compassion, responsibility and beyond — are obvious and we want to continue to develop those connections."

Olsson has co-chaired the National Character Education Conference from its inception in 2004. It

too has grown, from a fledgling gathering of teachers in a church basement. This year Olsson says there will be more than 600 educators in attendance, as well as students from every school in Trillium Lakelands District School Board.

Details, including cost for the event and registration information, are available at www.ncec.ca.

The conference proper begins the evening of Nov. 2 and continues Nov. 3.

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Capsule Comments

with, **Bill Coon, B.C. Phm.**

October is *SIDS Awareness Month*. The risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) can be reduced significantly if the infant sleeps on its back, not its tummy. Breathing is easier this way. Parents should be sure to inform babysitters of this important principle as well.

Our high blood pressure patients sometimes ask us if they have to take their pills for a lifetime. In uncomplicated cases, and if blood pressure has been well controlled for over one year, there is a chance the pills can be stopped. However, don't stop any medication without consulting your doctor. There are many factors to consider like the condition of the kidneys, eyes and heart, reduced salt and alcohol consumption as well as daily exercise. You doctor is your best advisor.

Of all the claims attributed to eating garlic, the ones that have been somewhat proven are that it lowers blood pressure, reduces the risk of blood clots and helps protect the blood vessels. Some people eat fresh garlic cloves but there are garlic extracts available that may be easier to take.

When you get a cold, you are contagious for about one day before the symptoms appear and for about five days afterwards. The virus is in large amounts in nasal secretions and it is very important to wash your hands often, both when you have a cold and when you don't have a cold.

There are new regulations governing the use of cold medications in children less than six years of age. Ask our pharmacists how this will affect your children.

Muskoka Medical Centre Pharmacy
348 Muskoka Rd. 3 N., Huntsville, Ontario
Bill Coon, Pharmacist, Barbara Coon, Pharmacist
789-1785

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Copy Deadline.....**October 16, 2009**
Distribution Date.....**October 29, 2009**

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