PHOTO BY LINDA SANDSMARK

Diversified Mobile Smiles dental hygienist Vicki Harris goes on the road to clean the teeth of shut-ins.

By Linda Sandsmark

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A San Lorenzo High graduate and her best friend have teamed up to provide mobile professional teeth cleaning services to shut-ins, including the elderly, disabled and anyone else who is unable to come to a traditional dental office.

Their business, Diversified Mobile Smiles, Inc., travels to Alameda, Contra Costa, Napa, Solano, Marin and San Francisco counties.

Registered Dental Hygienists Vicki Harris and Claire Fleckles took an extra year of training in order to become Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice (RDHAP). The additional license allows them to visit patients in a variety of settings, from skilled nursing facilities and adult day care to private homes.

“We’ve been best friends since back in 1995,” says Harris, the San Lorenzo High grad. “We both worked in traditional dentist offices. Then we went back to school to become independent providers, and it’s been a wonderful thing. The program was down at West Los Angeles College, and once a month we drove to L.A. for the eight-month course.”

Demand for their services has grown so much during the interim that they are each on the road four to five days a week, sometimes working with a dozen patients at a location. They work gently and quickly, knowing many frail people can't tolerate an open mouth for too long.

"A cleaning may take only a few minutes if the patient only has a few teeth," says Harris. "Others may take longer, maybe 30 to 35 minutes. We make sure to get all the tartar and bacteria out. Then most of the patient's care will be what happens daily when they brush and floss."

Services provided include dental cleanings with or without fluoride, oral assessments and cancer screenings, denture cleaning, and oral hygiene instructions modified for each individual. They accept Medi-Cal, Delta, and private pay. A typical visit is a $100 flat fee.

Groups such as Community Assistance for the Retarded and Handicapped (CARH) bring Diversified Mobile Smiles in to their activity center frequently, to make sure developmentally disabled clients have quality dental care.

"Convenience is everything," says Fleckles, who has worked in dental offices since 1997. "We're dedicated to providing concerned and comfortable dental hygiene care at a reasonable cost, in the comfort of the patient's own home environment."

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