

## SOUTHWEST SMILEMAKERS PROGRAM HAS A HOME

The “Bus”, as it was fondly called, has been parked but that doesn’t mean the Southwest SmileMakers Dental Program is idle. Quite the contrary.

SmileMakers, a program of the San Juan Basin Health Department, provides dental care for children from lower-income families. It is funded through grants, Medicaid reimbursements and some creative community fundraising efforts.

More than 550 children in Southwest Colorado received dental care services last year, much of it delivered by a mobile recreational vehicle that was converted into a traveling dental clinic in 2006. The mobile bus allowed the SmileMakers program to provide dental hygiene, restorative and dental educational services at preschool, and elementary schools throughout a four-county area.

While visiting local schools, a dental hygienist from SmileMakers has educated their young patients on good hygiene practices, provided screening and made referrals for restorative or emergency dental care. During the school year, about three-fourths of the children screened also received dental treatment – prophylaxis, fluoride treatment and sealants during a follow-up visit by the “Bus”.

Beginning in December, 2007, SmileMakers moved its dental clinic to a permanent home at The Commons Building in Durango. The setting has allowed the staff to offer more dental hygiene clinics and provide additional services to the community. Last fall, a permanent site also opened in Cortez and a Pagosa Springs dentist made his office available to SmileMakers clients.

In addition to support from foundations such as Caring for Colorado Foundation and grants from programs like the Colorado Rural Mobile Health Project, local community fundraising efforts have helped to sustain SmileMakers. The annual SmileMakers Diner’s Card program involves 26 local restaurants, who provide a discount off food, and other merchants who sell the card throughout the year.

For more information about SmileMakers, contact Suzanne Heller at 970-385-4480 or email [Suzanne@sjbhd.org](mailto:Suzanne@sjbhd.org).

