

Volunteering for smiles: Local dentist helps provide global care

By **CYD LASS**

Staff Writer

WORLAND — Since 2010, volunteers from Nelson and Page Dental of Worland have been traveling across the world to provide free dental care to children in multiple locations through a non-profit organization, Global Dental Relief.

Jim Gilman has been a part of these trips.

Gilman first found out about this project when he was with Jimmy Nelson at a meeting in Denver where they met two people who were spreading the word about the organization.

GLOBAL DENTAL RELIEF

According to their website, Global Dental Relief (GDR) was founded by the Himalayan Dental Relief Project by Director of Colorado State Parks Laurie Matthews and dentist Andrew Holecek. The two started the program after a trip to Nepal, where they recognized the desperate need for dental care as there were only 120 dentists for a population of 24 million.

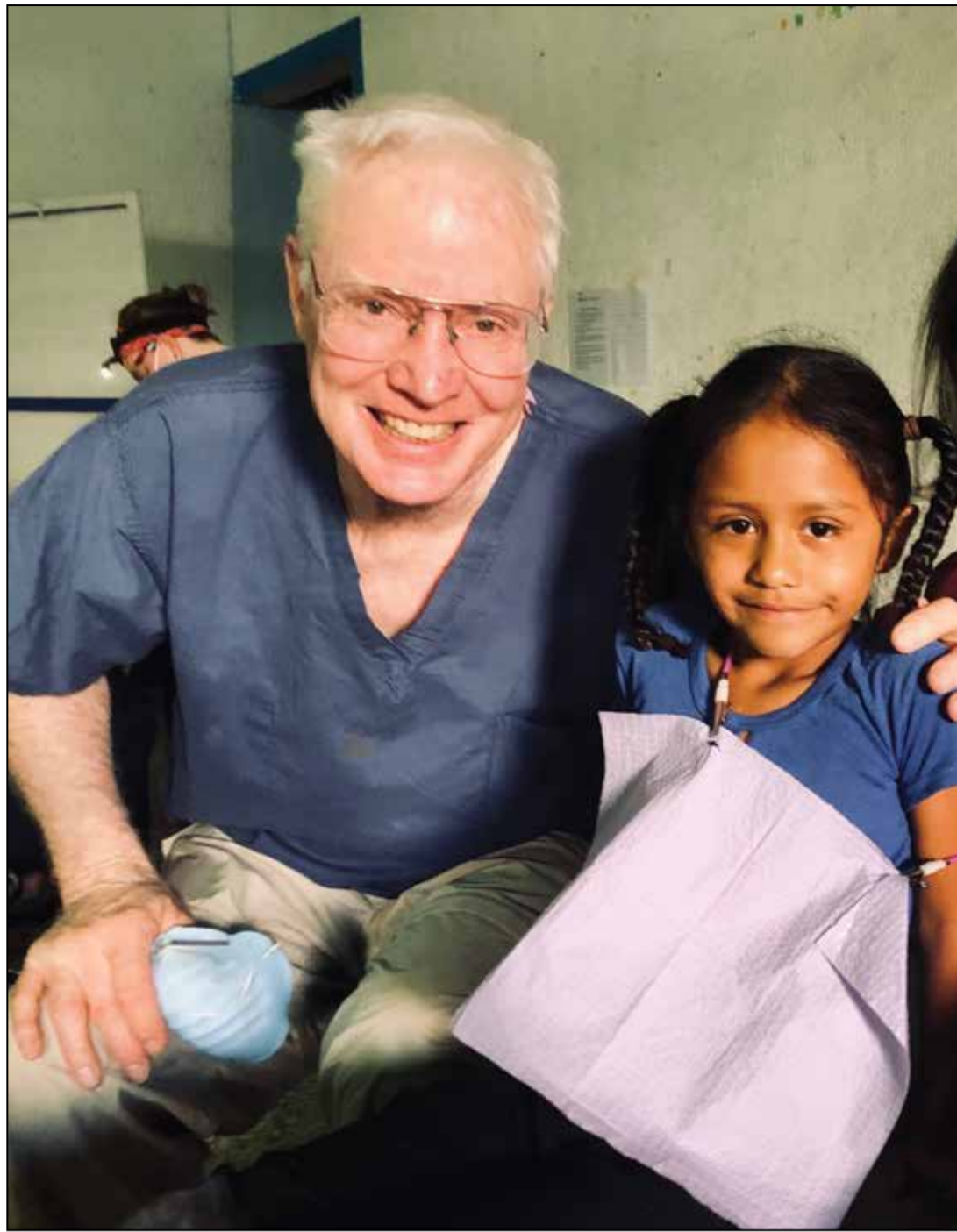
In 2003, Matthews and Holecek were joined in this effort by Kim Troggio, an adventure travel expert. Clients of hers were seeking to connect more deeply with the people and communities on their sightseeing tours. Troggio knew that not only local children but also international travelers could be transformed by the experience of providing service in remote communities around the globe.

Troggio currently serves as the director of the organization while Holecek serves on the board of Emeritus. Through their combined effort, more than 2,600 volunteers have provided over \$35 million in donated care to over 170,000 children.

GDR is committed to providing dental care for those who need it most, namely children. People experience the majority of their oral development in their early childhood and teen years. They form the habits that shape their adult lives.

In many parts of the world, there are few dentists and the cost of care is financially beyond reach for children and families. Global Dental Relief provides the first dental care and oral health education of their young lives. Without dental care, a small area of decay can remain untreated growing each year until it becomes infected and inflamed. This infection and chronic pain can result in a child's ability to sleep, eat, focus and lead a healthy life.

Volunteers of GDR bring critical oral health care and education to children. According to their website, through teams of dental and non-dental professionals, volunteers provide exams,



Jim Gilman sits with a young dental patient in Guatemala on a recent trip.

cleanings, fillings, fluoride treatments and extractions as needed. During their visit, each child is provided with a new toothbrush and critical oral health education. Volunteers return to treat these children every two years.

People of all ages and backgrounds volunteer for the program. Volunteers with a love of children, spirit of adventure and passion to make a difference in communities of need around the world are the "lifeblood" of GDR. Not just dentists volunteer for this program. Each trip needs dentists, hygienists, assistants and non-dental volunteers.

Volunteers work in a team of 12 to 20 people. Globaldentalrelief.org states that "The most important skills needed are an open mind, a sense of humor and a willingness to be a team player and work hard." Volunteers are trained in GDR's model of care at the beginning of each project.

Each project includes a six-day intensive dental clinic followed by an opportunity to explore the surrounding area and culture. Projects vary from eight to 21 days.

The program sends volunteers to countries including Guatemala, Cambodia, India, Nepal and Kenya.

GILMAN'S TRIPS

According to Gilman,

clinics include five dentists, four hygienists and 12 volunteers.

Since starting, Gilman has been to Guatemala seven times, Kenya once and went to Nepal in April.

Gilman got back from his most recent trip to Guatemala June 10.

One of his most memorable trips included one to Guatemala last year.

"We had a volcano go off within nine miles of our hotel — where we were staying," Gilman said. "They shut down the airport and they shut down the schools because there was so much volcanic ash in the air. That was pretty exciting."

Also on his list was his trip to Nepal.

"I think that was one of the best trips I've been on. We saw 970 kids in six kids of dentistry. Some of them we did fillings, others we did extractions, quite a few of them we probably cleaned their teeth and did fluoride applications," he said.

Gilman explained that on a usual trip, they try to see 100 kids a day.

"We set up a clinic, usually in an empty gymnasium or some kind of open building," he said. "We try and stress three different times throughout that visit that each child receives instructions on how to keep their teeth clean."

According to Gilman, with most cases, they em-

phasize the importance of oral hygiene and try to only do fillings on permanent teeth, but do extract baby teeth.

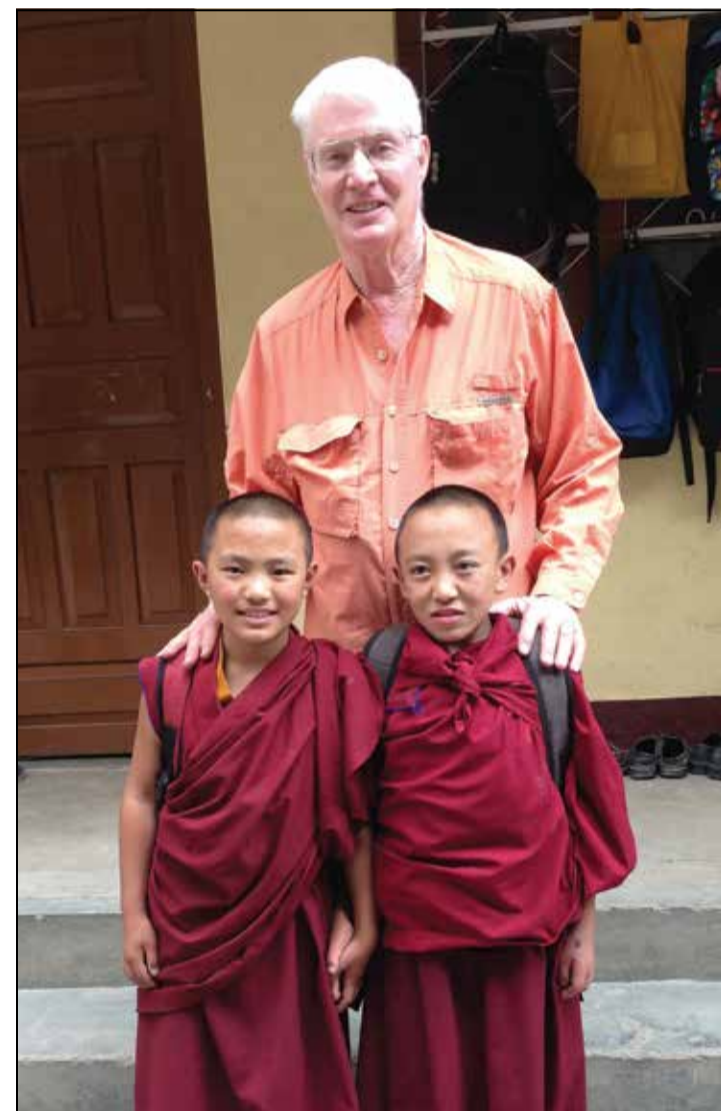
The program mainly treats children age 5 through 18.

Another memorable event to have happened included Gilman getting a blast from the past when encountering fellow dentist Randall Wiley. According to GDR, Wiley and Gilman worked together as dentists in the United States Army Dental Corps. Without any pre-planning or communication over several decades, the two happened to be on the same team treating children in Antigua, Guatemala, in May 2017. The two have now volunteered together twice. They are planning to reunite once more in 2019 or 2020 to continue their re-found friendship.

"The hair on the back of my neck still stands up thinking about it — that 46 years after working side-by-side in a two-chair clinic, we would meet in Antigua, Guatemala," Gilman said. "Randall taught me everything I know about pediatric dentistry!"



Jim Gilman stands with two of the patients in Guatemala.



Jim Gilman stands with two young monks in Nepal.

For the last three years, Gilman has brought his granddaughter, Naya Shimé. "She'd been interested in going into dentistry, so I've been taking her," he said. "Guatemala is a relatively short trip and not too difficult."

Along with trips with other volunteers, Gilman also did an individual trip where he spent eight days in Malawi with Jenner and Brant Edelman.

Gilman first realized he wanted to be a dentist because of his father who was a dentist. He grew up in Minnesota where he attended the University of Minnesota, graduating in 1970. He then spent time in New Campbell, Kentucky.

Afterwards, he came to Worland where he started a project from scratch.

"Worland's been a great place to live, practice and raise children," he said.

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Jim Gilman (back row, left side) and his granddaughter, Naya Shimé (back row, second from right) stand with other volunteers of Global Dentist Relief in Guatemala.