



DENTIST DONALD ERBES OF FAMILY AND COSMETIC DENTISTRY AT HIS OFFICE WITH WE CARE PATIENT NORKA HERNANDEZ.

DOUG FINGER

THE SMILE MAKER

DR. DONALD ERBES DOES HIS “MISSION TRIPS” RIGHT IN HIS OFFICE — OFFERING FREE LIFE-CHANGING DENTAL WORK THROUGH THE WE CARE PROGRAM

BY DIANE CHUN

AS A GAINESVILLE DENTIST in practice for 33 years, Dr. Donald Erbes knows what it can mean to a man or woman’s self-esteem if they have missing teeth or constant dental pain. Not to mention what it can mean to their job prospects.

Even if you’re down on your luck, Erbes says, you don’t want to be reduced to having your bad teeth pulled and replaced by dentures.

“If you are missing teeth, it makes life harder than it needs to be,” he says.

Erbes has participated in Alachua County’s We Care physician referral network since 1992.

Since then he has been filling cavities — and filling a need — for needy Alachua County residents of all ages who don’t have access to dental care.

The partnership with We Care has evolved

DR. DONALD ERBES, DDS

- **Age:** 67
- **Education:** Baylor College of Dentistry, Dallas
- **Came to Gainesville in 1976, has been in practice for 33 years.**
- **Personal:** Married to Joy, four children. Youngest is a freshman at Clemson, the older three are married.

into Project: Dentists Care under the umbrella of the Florida Dental Association. Participating dentists provide cleanings, evaluation and treatment planning, X-rays, fillings and extractions.

Erbes sees patients referred to him through We Care in his dental office in northwest Gainesville.

“Working these patients into the practice, even if it is just one of the 300 patients you’ll see in a month, doesn’t really affect your overhead and it helps a lot of people,” he says.

The patients who come to him through the referral process usually need quite a bit of dental work, and Erbes may see them once a week for months.

“To me, when you work in your office, you can do tons of work in a very efficient manner,” the dentist explains. “It’s like a carpenter working with his own tools.”

And when they see the results, his patients are wonderfully appreciative.

That’s just one more bonus he’s gleaned by setting down roots in Gainesville after completing dental school in Dallas, Erbes says.

Erbes sees dentistry as a caring profession and says most of the dentists he knows give back in some way. For some, it may be on mission trips to impoverished foreign locales.

Erbes prefers to share his gift right here at home.

“When you see the smile on a patient’s face when the work is done, it is really fulfilling,” he says. 🌿