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Delaware dentists Robert Arm and Michael Gioffre helped the Vietnamese improve their dental care.



Vietnamese children gather around Gioffre to learn how to care for their teeth. Basic dental care is unavailable to many of the children.

Smiles miles from home

Two local dentists share their skills with Vietnamese

By LURLEEN BLACK
Staff reporter

In temperatures of 100 degrees and higher, two local dentists recently went on an excursion to bring better dental care to the less fortunate.

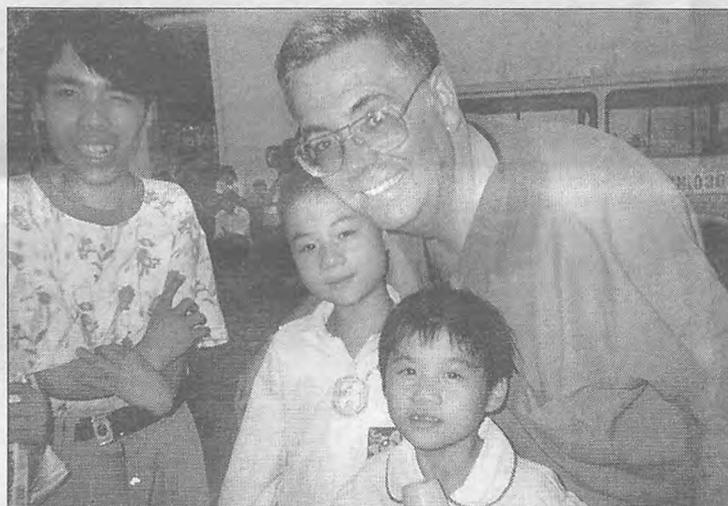
Christiana Care Health System dentists Robert Arm and Michael Gioffre spent 10 days in early June in Vietnam with mostly disabled and poor children who rarely or never have received dental care.

"The condition of their teeth was a lot better than I expected," said Arm, a Brandywood resident and chairman of the health system's dentistry department, who was making his first trip to Vietnam.

Gioffre, who had been to Vietnam in 1997 and 1998 with the Operation Smile dental mission, said he noticed improvement in the Vietnamese's understanding of how to care for their teeth.

Operation Smile is a private medical organization that provides medical attention and reconstructive surgery for children in developing nations and the United States.

The Delawareans, who work out of Wilmington Hospital, joined 15 other dentists from throughout the United States to teach Vietnamese dental students and to provide care to



Arm was happy to see so many smiles on his first trip to Vietnam.

children ages 2 to 16.

Almost half of the children cared for were from orphanages for the deaf and mute, Bancroft Mills resident Gioffre said.

While he worked on patients, the Vietnamese dental students stood over his shoulders observing the procedure of cleaning, giving X-rays and repairing teeth.

With supplies from the Colgate-Palmolive Co., the American dentists and the Vietnamese students taught more than 180 children how to properly care for their teeth, including brushing and flossing daily.

Half of the trip was dedicated to clinical work, while the other half was used for classroom instruction.

"When we go, we are helping them establish a dental school in the North so they can be self-sufficient," Arm said.

Educators in Vietnam want to build a new dental school because there are few dentists there with private practices, he said. As a result, the Vietnamese cannot visit a dentist every six months, the recommended practice in the United States.

Arm said that while in Vietnam, the dentists administered the same quality care that they would have given in America.

He said the experience was rewarding for him because the people there learned what being a citizen is all about.

"They learned as human beings they must give back to their communities, their country, to their world," he said.

Although he had to endure intense heat and eat unfamiliar foods, Arm said he would not have traded the experience.

He said, "This is enjoyable work when you see the smiles."

