



Florida Keys Community Marathon News

KEYS AHEC OPENS MOBILE DENTAL UNIT IN MARATHON

By Alex Rickert - January 12, 2022

Middle Keys kids have a big reason to smile with confidence, thanks to the opening of Keys AHEC's Mobile Dental Unit.

The unit will provide crucial dental resources for disadvantaged children, including exams, X-rays, cleanings, fillings, sealants, fluoride and education. The unit even features an intraoral camera system that may be used to present patients' symptoms to consulting dentists and surgeons at Nicklaus Children's Hospital in Miami or other facilities. Services require only a \$10 encounter fee, with no other costs to parents.

"This started as a grain of sand in an oyster that turned into a beautiful pearl," said Wally Smith. "And that pearl is what you see behind me."

The mobile unit is the brainchild of Smith and former Waypoint Foundation president Clarice Yentsch, and came to fruition guided by Smith's experience running a successful mobile clinic in North Carolina more than 20 years ago. Once the two united and made a presentation to the Waypoint Foundation's board, the Mobile SmileMaker initiative was born.

"Clarice is the dreamer of the organization," said current Waypoint President Chris Golia. "She planted the seed, and we all kind of developed it."

Shortly thereafter, Smith spoke to Michael Cunningham and established what would become the initiative's most vital partnership, with Keys AHEC.



"The mission of the Waypoint Foundation is to celebrate excellence and creativity in education exhibitions and collaborations, and this is the ultimate collaboration," said Yentsch, referencing the contributions of Baptist Health South Florida, the Health Foundation of South Florida, and the Ocean Reef Community Foundation, among dozens of others.

The foundation originally aimed to raise \$125,000, the cost of a mobile unit when the initiative began, within two years. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic's need for mobile testing and vaccine clinics resulted in price hikes and made units scarce, Yentsch and others realized they would need other helping hands to reach the finish line.

"We transferred the assets from the Waypoint Foundation to AHEC to become a down payment, and Cunningham raised the rest of the necessary funds in just seven months," said Yentsch.

After three years of activities and fundraising, Cunningham was thrilled to wield the massive scissors and officially open the mobile clinic with a ribbon cutting.

"What you see behind me is bold, it's big, it's beautiful, and we're ready to start seeing patients," he said.

The mobile unit's full schedule and other information is available at www.keysahec.org/dental. The unit's next visits to Marathon will be from Feb. 1-3 at Stanley Switlik School and March 8-10 at Marathon High School. Parents can schedule required appointments by calling 305-743-7111 ext. 220.

ALEX RICKERT

Hailing from Rhode Island, the Ocean State, Alex has always spent as much of his life as possible in and around the water. A dolphin trainer by profession, he still spends most of his free time diving, spearfishing, and JetSkiing. Once it gets too dark for those things, he can usually be found at the Marathon Community Theater, where he spends most nights still trying to figure out what the heck he is doing.

