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Dentists give needy kids a reason to smile

By **STEVE KOBAK**
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Kindergartner Jonathan Hartwell had a big smile on his face as he looked up at his dentist and thanked her for cleaning his teeth.

Hartwell, 6, and other children received free dental care at Norwalk Smiles Dental Center, 49 Day St., on Saturday as part of the second annual "Give Kids a Smile Day."

"We decided this year that we were going to target uninsured kids who had income restrictions," said Norwalk Smiles Director Adele Gordon. "They can't get to dentists and even sometimes a sliding fee scale is not enough for them."

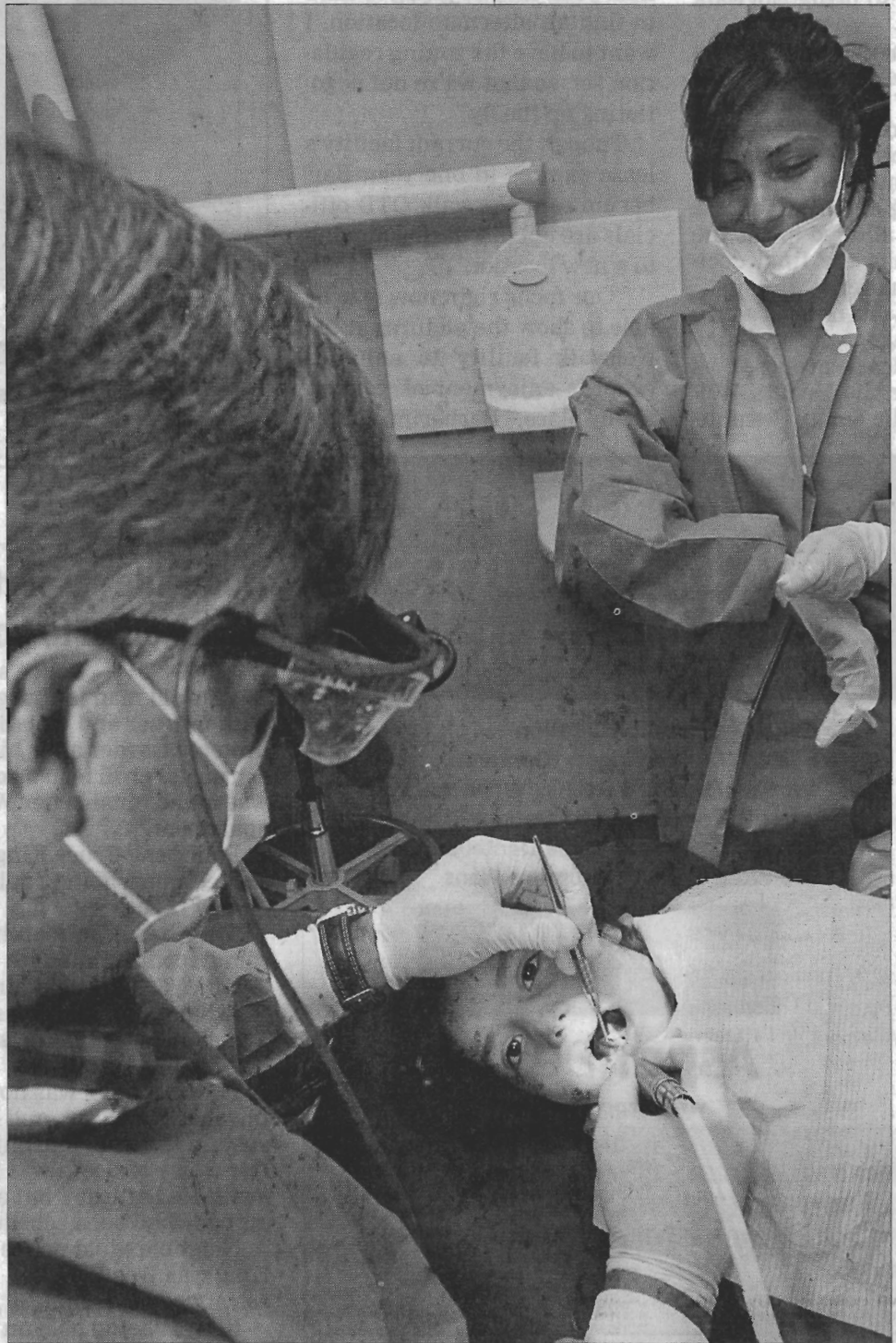
The event was part of an annual cross-country initiative sponsored by the American Dental Association to promote dental care for needy children.

Dentists at Norwalk Smiles cleaned the teeth of 22 children, most of whom were uninsured and spoke Spanish as their native tongue, for the event. Three dentists and multiple bi-lingual dental assistants took part in the event.

Marco Lima Jr., 8, a second-grader from Jefferson Elementary School, had a tooth pulled during his appointment.

Speaking through a translator, his father, who is also named Marco Lima, said it is important for his son to have access to dental care, even though he is uninsured and otherwise could not afford the treatment.

In addition to the teeth cleaning, some of the patients had root canals and other dental procedures. Some patients will also receive a follow-up appointment to correct serious den-



Hour photo/ERIK TRAUTMANN
Dr David Stebbins works on 4 year old Seline Reyes while his assistant Sonya Garcia looks on during the Norwalk Smiles "Give Kids a Smile Day" Saturday. Stebbins donated his time to the program which treated 22 uninsured children.

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Gordon said, though some children required serious dental procedures, they were patient and well-behaved. A 4-year-old even needed a root canal at the event and Gordon said the patient was cooperative throughout the procedure.

"We haven't had one crying kid here today," she said.

Dr. David Stebbins, who has a general dentistry practice on 116 East Avenue, took part in the event and noticed a trend among the youngsters. He witnessed a high amount of tooth decay in the young children due ingredients in the candies, sodas and sports drinks they ingest.

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