

Philanthropy

Foundation makes beneficiaries smile

By Paul Holmes
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The Smile for a Lifetime Foundation has formalized what Dr. Ben Burris has been doing since he established his orthodontics practice in Jonesboro in 2004 giving back to the community.

The foundation, with Aimee Spencer as executive director, began this month choosing patients to receive free orthodontic care.

The Smile for a Lifetime Foundation is governed by a board of community leaders who evaluate on a case-by-case basis orthodontic and financial needs of referrals to the foundation. Orthodontist Dr. Jim Wagner and dentist Dr. Bruce Taylor are two of the board's members. Burris serves in an

advisory capacity. Two deserving cases are chosen each month for the free care. Spencer said the foundation "has a very dynamic board" that will make the decisions about who will receive the free care.

Burris said he wanted to commit to doing two cases a month and not just doing them as he saw fit; and second, also to formalize and standardize the selection process so that it was more evenly applied and got input from others about who is most deserving.

Through the foundation Burris will be donating 24 orthodontic cases per year, at a value of approximately \$130,000. Burris said he was taught by his parents at an early age to appreciate what he has and to try to help others who are not as fortunate.

A native of Memphis, Tenn. Burris grew up in South Carolina and earned DDS and MDS degrees from the University of Tennessee School of Dentistry in Memphis.



Dr. Ben Burris

Aimee Spencer

The foundation will seek "folks who have taken reasonable care of their teeth but who need" the straightening that orthodontics can provide, Burris said. "In some cases," Burris said, patients who need braces but can't afford them are suffering "a severe social handicap" because of their

appearance. "We're looking for people who are doing the best they can and who will get the maximum benefit" from the free services which will be provided at the Arkansas Orthodontic Centers practice, Spencer said.

Burris said the foundation is seeking donors in two categories - members of the foundation's Founder's Club who will commit to making a \$10,000 donation, and members of the Adopt a Smile club who will commit to giving \$3,000. Though the orthodontic services will be donated, he said, his practice is limited to orthodontics and he cannot perform general dentistry services that may be needed for the qualifying patients. Local dentists "have been real good about donating their services," but Burris said he hopes the club donors will be able to underwrite the dental materials and supplies.

Referrals are expected to come from teachers, counselors and others "who are advocates for that child" who needs the free services, Burris said. **PHOTO**