

# Smile FOR A Lifetime

Foundation  
smiling faces through braces

By LeAnn Askins

Since he first established an orthodontic practice, Dr. Ben Burris has found so many children who needed braces. The problem is that many families simply can't afford the expense, generally several thousand dollars, due to lack of insurance coverage or other financial reasons.

Through the years, Burris has done what he could to help as many children as possible receive the perfect smile, offering the service at no charge to a few children each year. He was looking for a new way to help even more children, though.

"We wanted to formalize it," he explained. There was also the need to offer braces to a broader group of people, not just his patients. Through that desire, the Smile For A Lifetime Foundation was born.

Burris, who first opened an orthodontic practice in Jonesboro in 2004, said he has seen many children through the years who were intelligent and friendly but whose smiles were holding them back.

"It's a real social handicap," he noted of a smile full of teeth that aren't straight or in the right place.

The orthodontist remembers one patient who was a thumb-sucker as a child, leading to extremely bad teeth as he got older. Burris stepped in to help.

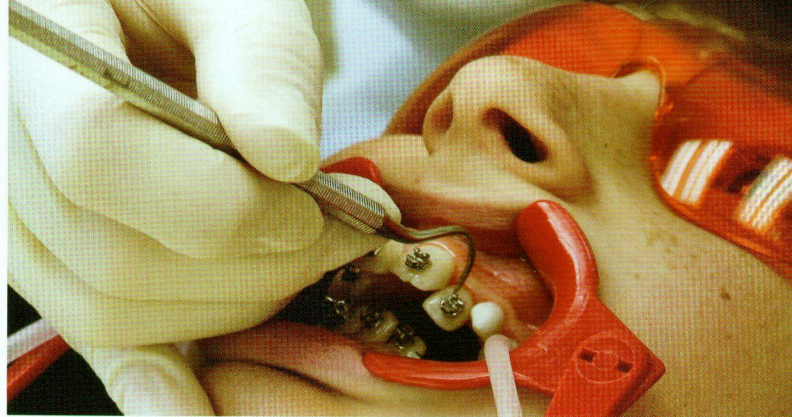
"It was life-changing for that little boy," he recalled.

Because most orthodontists do not accept Medicaid patients, there was an entire group of patients who wanted help but simply weren't able to receive it. By constructing The Arkansas Orthodontic Center at 3409 Gateway Cove, Burris is able to help those patients as well as those who are selected by the Smile For A Lifetime Foundation to receive braces at no cost.

The foundation is led by a board of directors from the community who review applications that are submitted by teachers, counselors, family friends and sometimes even the family or the applicant. The goal is to find children who are optimistic and have so much potential but who are being held back because of the condition of their teeth. The children (or adults, if the criteria fits) must have otherwise healthy teeth to qualify.

Setting up a foundation has also allowed for donations from individuals and businesses to help with administrative supply and material costs, plus taking care of dental procedures such as extractions. If the foundation can secure enough donations then severe cases requiring surgery or other procedures could be considered.

Burris is also working with orthodontists in other states to establish similar programs.



"We're really excited," he said of the possibilities that will come with the expansion of the program throughout the country.

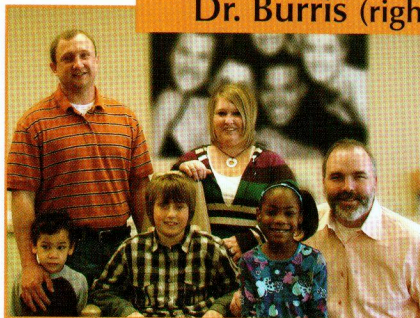
While the program is still new, several area families have already benefited from the program.

Tracon Brown and his family know exactly what kind of a difference receiving braces through Smile For A Lifetime can make.

With three children, Brian and Dusty Brown knew they couldn't afford braces for their son, Tracon, even though he desperately needed them.

After hearing about the foundation, their hope in getting help was renewed. After his application was selected and an examination to see if he would qualify, Tracon received braces in early February.

## Brown Family & Dr. Burris (right)



"He's had a mood change," Brian Brown said of his son. "He's ready to get them off and have straight teeth!" Brian said they had searched for a couple of years for a way to get braces for their son.

"We had been to the orthodontist before ... there was just no way we could pay for it."

Dusty Brown heard about Smile For A Lifetime and the application process started.

"We didn't think we'd get it, but we thought we'd give it a try," Brian recalled. He commended the foundation for the work they are doing in the community.

"I think it's a wonderful program," he said. "They're awesome. They're just the nicest people you'll ever meet."

Dusty said when she received the call that Tracon's application had been selected she was "completely shocked. I cried."

After calling everyone she could think of to share the news with them, she prepared to tell her son. A surprise trip to his school, with balloons and a set of novelty chattering teeth, gave Tracon the news he had been hoping to receive.

"He needed it so bad and there is no way we could afford it," Dusty explained. "It's a blessing for us and for Tracon. I think it will give him a lot more self-confidence."

To learn more about area children who have benefited from the program or to find out more about the program/application process, visit [www.s4l.org](http://www.s4l.org)