Liz Spooner retires from Gator Grins

Huntington – Liz Spooner, whose idea for a dental outreach program at Gateway eventually led to “Gator Grins”, retired from the program in early June.

Spooners reports that the idea for the program occurred to her twenty years ago, while she was at a Gateway elementary school, doing a dental hygiene education program. “I had a crazy idea of bringing full dental care to our school,” she recalled. “That crazy idea is called Gator Grins and is now in its 10th year of providing full services to our students in the Gateway Regional School District.”

“Providing care to patients in a school-based setting has been very rewarding,” Liz reported. “It’s great to see a student become cavity free. Or help a very young child overcome their fear of dentistry by coming in every week to “just visit” until they feel comfortable enough for treatment.” In addition to her work as a hygienist with the program, which operates in all of the Gateway schools, Liz has provided educational programs to Gateway’s youngest students to learn to care for their teeth and to overcome any fear they might have about going to see the dentist.

One of Spooner’s favorite memories is of a Gateway high school student who interned with Gator Grins and is now in college, studying to become a dentist.

She credits her colleagues at the Hilltown Community Health Center for making Gator Grins a reality, including Dental Director Dr. Mary Lou Stuart, Dentist Dr. Emily Bowden, Program Manager Kirsten Cooper, Coordinator Kris Brakey, Registered Hygienist Lori Paquette and the programs’ dental assistants Sue Hedges and Karen Rowe. “The hard work and dedication of this staff is outstanding and impressive,” Spooner said.

“Liz will continue to work at the Worthington Health Center, but felt it was time to pass the torch in the school-based programs,” reported Kirsten Cooper, who runs Gator Grins and the Gateway School-Based Health Center. Hygienists Lori Paquette and Julia Baranyuk will continue to cover the program.

Gator Grins provides comprehensive dental exams, x-rays, dental cleanings, fluoride varnishes, dental sealants, amalgam fillings, (silver fillings) composite fillings, (white fillings) and emergency dental care to students at school. Once your child is enrolled in the Gator Grins program, it takes care of all of children’s dental needs. After each child is seen they will come home with a form that explains what was done on that day. All enrollment forms for the school-based health programs are sent home at the beginning of the school year with students.

###
Photos: Liz Spooner, teaching young children how to brush their teeth, as part of her work at “Gator Grins”—a school-based dental program at Gateway. Below: her goodbye cake featuring the Gator Grins logo!