

Transcript

Janet Michael

Hello and welcome to the Valley. Today I am your host Janet Michael. It is a bonus Laurel Ridge Community College episode today. We are on the Zooms with Brandi Hawkins voice. She is director of communications and outreach for Laurel Ridge Community College. She's actually in Jamaica right now along with Kathy Cantor who is one of my favorite Sorry, Tammy Stevenson, but Kathy is up there pretty close and they are there on a mission trip with three recent graduates from the dental hygienist program at Laurel Ridge Community College. We're going to talk to them in the next segment, but Brandy, I want to start with you and say thank you for thinking to call me to record a show while you're in Jamaica of all places.

Brandy Hawkins Boies

Yeah, my pleasure. Thanks for making it happen and connecting with us.

Janet Michael

So tell me a little background about this program. How is it that Laurel Ridge ended up on mission trips with these dental hygiene students?

Brandy Hawkins Boies

So I've had the pleasure of being a Rotarian for a little over 20 years and about 10 years ago I remember. I'm sure I heard it before then, but you're starting to perk up a little bit more hearing Kathy talk about rotaries work in Jamaica with the dental clinic and at that time I was in student And one of the things I had been concentrating on was getting opportunities for our students to do alternative spring break trips or any travel type of service experiences. And I started to connect, well, we have a dental hygiene program and there's dental work happening in Jamaica. So I went into the class of 2018. They started in fall of 2016, the dental hygiene class after Kathy and I had brainstormed the idea. And we went in and presented this idea to them and said, hey, there's an opportunity to go do some service in Jamaica when you graduate. And at that time, I really didn't know much. I knew a little bit that Kathy had told me, but I gave them the bare bones as I don't know where we'd stay right now. I don't know how it would look, but are you willing to take a risk? And they did. Thanks to the support of Rotarians and Rotary groups in our region, we were able to bring four students in 2018. And now we're back in 2026. Because of COVID and other things that unfolded, we haven't been able to get back, but we're proud to be back. We're having a great time this year. So the

dental hygiene program takes 18 students every two years. It's a very competitive program. These students study a lot, they have a lot of stress on them. So to add this layer on top of it, these are really unique students that want to take on that extra challenge to fundraise and make it happen right after graduation.

Janet Michael

Kathy, as a former Rotarian, I'm somewhat familiar with its international work that Rotary does, but how did you come to be involved in this and then Rotary in general?

Kathy Kantor

Byron and I have traveled to Jamaica for 35 years, so we knew Jamaica and we knew the need. And as we progressed in Rotary and found out what various opportunities were out there, in 2015 we wrote what was called a global grant. And that was to further develop in a partnership an eye and dental clinic in Jamaica. So the first big grant was written in 2015, and that's probably when Brandy began to hear me say, Hey, this is what we're doing because basically you needed money. So our local Rotary clubs, Woodstock, Front Royal, Warren County, Winchester, Strasburg, we all went together and did that grant. So everybody was aware of the process. And that was really the beginning for us truly practicing because as you know, you can't do dentistry without the the heavy basic equipment. And so that's what these grants, the first one provided more, but also to an eye clinic. The second one we just did provided three more mobile units, and that's actually what the students used this time. Three mobile units in a container that has been converted to a dental office, and that again is a partnership.

Janet Michael

For the students and the graduates that you're taking with you on these mission trips. It comes in really handy that it's basically set up for them when they get there. You're not having to ship equipment, any of that sort of thing. They're only having to bring the disposables that they would need with them on each particular trip.

Kathy Kantor

That's correct, and the model that we use also will dentists, offices, other teams to come in and use the equipment. That was the design of the program. and it actually is working. 2 other groups have already used our equipment. So again, back to the rotary. idea of partnerships, you can get much more done. And that truly is what's necessary. We have the support of the Negril Rotary Club, which is a club right here that actually supports us. The woman that manages the actual clinic that we use is a Rotarian. So it takes a lot of people to make this happen. You're exactly right. You have to have the big stuff here.

Janet Michael

So we're doing something a little unusual today in that we are recording this conversation hours before it is about to air and you were in your last day of service on this trip. Tell me a little bit Kathy about who you've seen and what you've done in the last four days.

Kathy Kantor

Clinically, the graduate hygienist have seen over 100 patients and that is a true full cleaning exam or hygiene instruction, just like a patient would receive in an office at home. So that's what they did, clinical service for four days. And now on the fifth day, we're going to go up into the hills outside of Negril to a school called Revival. And it's actually a community initiative. And the school has about 275 children, ages three to six in the basic and then six to 12 in the primary. And we will teach each class how to brush their teeth, good nutrition, what they can do to protect their teeth hands on to each classroom. So each class will have a chance to ask questions of the hygienist. And it will be for probably 50% of these children, the first time they've had any interaction with the dental professional. And I would say half of the patients that the students saw were probably the first time they've had their teeth cleaned as an adult. They maybe would have had them tracked at a school visit by somebody, but dental care is very difficult here, very expensive.

Janet Michael

And I think that's the beauty of you spending this last day at the school, because by teaching these children at a young age what they need to do as a preventive measure, you may over time not have to see them in the clinic for issues or problems later.

Kathy Kantor

Absolutely. always the objective.

Janet Michael

So since these mission trips are every few years, I'm assuming that you and Rotary clubs are fundraising for them year round.

Brandy Hawkins Boies

2016 is when we started the effort and myself and the students would go around and present to Rotary clubs and we did and have received a lot of support from those Rotarian clubs in our region. And then we raised again the class of 2020 that came in in 2018. We started raising money and a lot of that was from Rotary, but then COVID hit.

We had when our airlines purchased and we had to cancel that trip and we've had some of that funding sitting there for the last few years. So this time around, we were able to say, okay, it's time to go back. These three students raised their hands, said we're in, And again, the support of Rotary clubs like to give a shout out to the Woodstock Rotary Club and the Strasburg Rotary Club for coming in and giving us our last dollars needed to make it a reality. But yeah, we heavily rely on Rotary support. It's not necessarily something that they budget each year. That is a goal we would like to maybe work towards so that we can ensure that every two years we have the funding there so that that is a goal we're working towards.

Janet Michael

Let's take a break when we come back. Let's meet these three women that you have brought with you on this trip and talk a little bit to them about their experience. Can we do that in the next segment?

Brandy Hawkins Boies

Absolutely.

Janet Michael

We're on the Zooms today, live-ish from Jamaica of sorts. Well, I'm not. I'm still in my kitchen, so I'm a little annoyed that Brandy gets to be in Jamaica and I'm still here in Middletown. Brandy Hawkins Voice is joining me. She is director of communications and outreach for Laurel Ridge Community College. Kathy Cantor, local Rotarian, is on the Zooms with us as well. When we come back, we're going to meet Stacy Escobar, Daisy Saul, and Natalie Hernandez and talk about their experiences on this mission trip. So hang in there just a couple of more minutes.

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Janet Michael

Welcome back to the Valley. Today I am your host Janet Michael. It is a bonus episode of Laurel Ridge Community College. Today Brandi Hawkins voice is joining me. She is their director of communications and outreach. She is actually in Jamaica right now on a mission trip with three recent graduates of the dental hygienist program at Laurel Ridge Community College. Kathy Cantor is with her as well. She is our local Rotarian extraordinaire. So we're going to talk to these recent graduates. We're going to start with Stacy Escobar. So Stacy, tell me a little bit about your background. How did you end up in this program and why did you want to do this trip?

Stacey Escobar

So I've been in the dental field for 16 years now. 14 of them I was a dental assistant and in that time, I really just fell in love with dentistry in general. And I realized the impact of oral health and how sometimes we take it for granted, especially back at home. And so this mission trip was really important because like Kathy said, education is the biggest part of all of this and being able to see people who have never maybe been to the dentist before, being able to see them and give them the same level of care that we give patients back home to them. They really appreciate it and who knows how long it'll be until they can get a dental cleaning again. So that's really what made a biggest, like the biggest impact to me that we were able to do that for them.

Janet Michael

So I realize that I'm about to ask you what's been your favorite thing so far, knowing that you have not yet gone to this elementary school, which likely will probably top whatever you may tell me right now, but what has been your favorite thing so far?

Stacey Escobar

When you come into this kind of environment, you don't know actually what you signed up for. So being able to see how organized it is and being able to know that these kinds of units that we're working with exist and we're able to still provide the same level of care to these patients. I think that was like the biggest. I just enjoyed that a lot and being able to see the amount of patients that we saw too, that was really rewarding as well.

Janet Michael

What is next for you? You've graduated from the program. You were already in the dental field. What are your plans?

Stacey Escobar

So the practice I've been with on and off for 10 years, I'll be going back with them and.

Janet Michael

So you're still staying somewhat local?

Stacey Escobar

Yes, I am.

Janet Michael

I wish you all the luck in the world and thank you for taking a couple of minutes to chat with me this morning. Thank you. Dahye Seo is up next on the hot seat. So Daisy, tell me a little bit about your background and why you wanted to be on this mission trip. So.

Dahye Seo

Seven years ago I decided to study dental hygiene program and I started from ESL and of course I have two kids, but. I didn't want to give up my new career. Now I'm here and I started the dental hygiene program two years ago. And then this beautiful lady, Brandy, came to our classroom and just herself. And then she talked about mission trip. And then that has been always on my bucket list that I love to help people. And then I, when I heard about mission training, like that's it, that's what I want. And I just didn't have any idea how to approach or how to do that. But as soon as I heard that, okay, this is it. And then that was a day one that has been in my mind until I graduate and I just joined it and I love it.

Janet Michael

What has been your favorite part of the trip so far? What have you learned?

Dahye Seo

Oh, they're smile after they're cleaning, like they smile big and they genuinely appreciated what we do. Yeah, that was my favorite part. And then some patients they cry like, can you hug me? Can you take a picture with me? Something like that. That has been great.

Janet Michael

I imagine that one of your favorite parts of this trip is going to be that visit to the school later this morning. That's going to be a highlight, I think, for you.

Dahye Seo

Absolutely, since I have two kids.

Janet Michael

So what's next for you now that you've graduated the program? What are your career plans?

Dahye Seo

I already signed the contract papers with the two offices, so I'm going to go see my family in July, June and July. I'm going to once I come back, I'm going to start working in the two offices.

Janet Michael

Thank you for taking the time this morning and I wish you good luck on your career path.

Dahye Seo

Thank you very much.

Janet Michael

So up next we're going to talk with Natalie Hernandez. She too is a recent graduate of the dental hygienist program at Laurel Ridge Community College. So Natalie, give me a little bit of your background and tell me why you wanted to be on this mission trip.

Nataly Hernandez

Well, my family dentist really encouraged me into the dental field. I was that kid that loved to get their teeth cleaned and loved going to the dentist. that fire and in 2023, I did the dental assisting program at Laurel Ridge and I assisted for a year before starting the hygiene program.

Janet Michael

And then when this mission trip opportunity presented itself, were you all in from the beginning? Did you want to go? Did you have to think about it? Why sign up for this?

Nataly Hernandez

I probably should have thought about it, but I really didn't. I was like, add my name to the list and now I'm here. No regrets so far. I'm really excited that I was able to come and I'm looking forward to hopefully doing it again.

Janet Michael

What has been your favorite thing so far? What have you learned?

Nataly Hernandez

My favorite thing I think is just the amount of patients we're able to get in. There's such a need here for oral health and for dental care and we have been able to see over 100

patients and that's just not something we would normally do. So being able to help so many people at one time is very rewarding.

Janet Michael

Did you expect the need to be as high when you got there?

Nataly Hernandez

Yes and no. Even where we are near Middletown, when we're working in the school, We see patients just to get our practice in and even some patients near us don't really truly know how to take care of their oral health. And so coming here where the need is even higher, I'm not really surprised. We have more resources back at home than they do here.

Janet Michael

So what's next for you now that you are an official graduate?

Nataly Hernandez

Obviously I'll be heading to work, but I'm actually coming back with a different group to do a different mission trip here in Jamaica. So I'm really excited to come back in about a month.

Janet Michael

That is fantastic. Thank you for taking the time to chat with me a bit today.

Brandy Hawkins Boies

Of course.

Janet Michael

Brandy, I want to go back to something that Natalie just said when she talked about seeing patients at the campus in Middletown. I'm not sure a lot of people know that is an option, right? Don't you do cleanings and things for people so that these get some lab hours.

Brandy Hawkins Boies

Yeah, it's a big part of the program and they would love for me to plug this. I'm sure they're always looking for individuals, volunteers to come in for free cleaning. That's how they practice. To find out more, you can visit our website floralridge.edu/dental and the next class would be thrilled to have people on the waiting list to call.

Janet Michael

So the next class will start in August and then it's a two year program. Will you go in talk to them about this mission trip at the beginning of their two years, or will you wait until they're closer to graduation to talk about going again in 2028?

Brandy Hawkins Boies

Oh no, I attacked them first day during orientation because it really, I mean, that's how I got these three ladies first day, but I certainly don't. I present it very much as an option. No pressure. You've got a very rigorous program you're getting ready to dive into that's going to require a lot of your attention, but you'd like to pursue this opportunity, we can start talking about it now. So yeah, we really do have to start talking about it and planning that seed in August because we're going to need to start fundraising. As you know, the cost of flights, the hotel, things like that are just getting higher and higher. So it does require us thinking about the funding and going out there and looking for donations.

Janet Michael

Kathy, before we wrap up, I want to ask you because these girls are talking about going back and doing this again. Isn't that what you hope for when Rotary puts a program together that you don't ever want these things to be a one off? So how cool is that for you to hear?

Kathy Kantor

It's absolutely cool. And they already know that Byron and I come with various teams three times a year. They are welcome to join. And that's what we have to do is get the word out that this is an ongoing Rotary opportunity or mission opportunity if your church or other group wants to support oral hygiene health in Jamaica. We have a spot for you. We are involved with other teams as well. So to hear them say they want to come back and join a team, that's great.

Janet Michael

How would people reach out to you, Kathy, if someone's listening today and they're like, hey, I want to get my church group together and go with them on one of these trips, would they reach out to you through Rotary? How would they get in contact with you?

Kathy Kantor

Absolutely. Rotary is the perfect way. Strasburg Rotary, we have a website, we have a Facebook page, or Brandy through Laurel Ridge. She can always find me.

Janet Michael

Got her own speed dial, don't you, Brandy? Absolutely.

Kathy Kantor

Works both ways.

Janet Michael

Brandy, thank you for taking time. I will say taking time out of your trip twice because we tried to have this conversation yesterday and I had a technical failure. So I appreciate that you were willing to do this one more time. I think this is a fantastic program and I am so excited to be able to let people know that these are some of the things that you can experience by being a student at Laurel Ridge Community College.

Brandy Hawkins Boies

Absolutely. Thank you for having us. It's an amazing opportunity to travel outside of your comfort zone, give back, but also dive into your profession. And so these three students have not only had the opportunity to serve, but also practice in real life and hone those skills in a different way to make us a little bit different and bring that back home so they're going back home into their profession. even more confident than they already were when they walked across the stage. So it's awesome to see.

Janet Michael

So before we wrap up the show today, I have to remind everybody, I know I reminded you last Friday and I apologize because I had my weekends confused. But this Saturday, tomorrow, as you're listening on Friday afternoon, the drone show at Jim Barnett Park is happening. Head over to Winchester City Park's Facebook page. All the details are there about parking and it's a free admission. You don't have to pay anything and it's something in the neighborhood of 250 drones are going to be putting on a show. It is definitely going to be something that you're going to want to see. So make sure you check that out this weekend. And then I will meet you back here on Monday for a brand new episode of the Valley today. Just a few minutes afternoon. So meet me here then.