



TWO certified dental assistant students, Danielle Urlacher (left) and Lisa Tetz, with the new dental equipment purchased for Okanagan College from a fundraising campaign.

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Golden opportunity for dental assistant students

An innovative fundraising campaign initiated by Okanagan College's certified dental assistant students has raised more than \$16,000 toward the purchase of a new dental mannequin, cabinetry and a state-of-the-art digital radiography unit for one of the program's training units.

The students, with the help of instructor Darcy Shaw, have set up a gold-reclamation program, collecting unwanted dental extractions containing precious metals from a variety of participating dental offices in the Okanagan, as well as pieces of unwanted or unusable jewelry and precious metals at a number of locations throughout the college.

"Everyone who has gold removed from their mouth by a dentist has the option of keeping the extraction," says Shaw.

"Most people don't know what to do with it so they choose to leave it behind at the dental office. We are hoping that if people know their donation can help students in need of new equipment, they will choose to keep their gold and will drop it off at one of the collection spots at the college."

The students have set up a program with participating

dentists and supply the dental offices with pre-labeled bags, which they pick up from the offices when they are full.

Once they have collected enough material to be processed, they send the teeth with precious metals to a Vancouver refinery.

The proceeds from the gold reclaimed from the donated extractions go directly to the purchase of much needed new equipment for the 24 students in the program.

"Everyone in the dental community has shown so much support for our program," says Brittany Davis, a certified dental assistant student. "We feel they believe in us—they don't want us to fail and want us to have the tools to succeed in life."

"We are appreciative and extremely aware of the generosity exhibited by the general public and dental industry for this fundraising campaign," says Kathy Butler, executive director of the Okanagan College Foundation.

"This initiative is an excellent example of the kind of support Okanagan College receives as we continue to build strong partnerships in the communities we serve."

In addition to collecting the dental extractions, the stu-

dents have set up a number of treasure chests at the college where people can donate any unwanted gold to the program.

Items like mismatched earrings, unwanted or damaged jewelry are some examples of commonly donated pieces.

"Purchasing new dental equipment is extremely costly," says Shaw. "We began this program to help raise the money for an important piece of equipment that will benefit the students' education and training immensely."

"We have secured funding for half of the cost of a digital radiography unit and are hoping to cover the remaining cost through our fundraising so that our students can be certified on the new technology."

The use of digital radiography is becoming more prevalent in the Okanagan as the unit exposes patients to much lower levels of radiation. The digital readout produces a computer-generated image of the tooth, which allows students to virtually take the tooth out of the socket, rotate it and show it to patients on a computer screen.

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