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Enterprise dentist makes a difference in Jerusalem

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Submitted photo

From left: Dr. Art Missirlian, patient Elzaza Shachar and Israeli dental assistant Michal Englander.

Special to The Ledger

Art and Penny Missirlian arrived in Israel on July 20 to spend a week volunteering at the Trudi Birger Dental Clinic in Jerusalem, through a special program called Dental Volunteers for Israel (DVI).

DVI provides free dental care and oral health education to thousands of needy children in Jerusalem every year, regardless of race and religion, thanks to the benevolent support from friends and visiting volunteer dentists from around the world.

DVI provides critical basic services to the poverty stricken communities of Jerusalem – with a total population of a mere 830,000, Jerusalem has over 200,000 youth living under the poverty line. DVI's Trudi Birger clinic treats disadvantaged children and at-risk youth (aged 4-26). Volunteer dentists from around the world, together with their Israeli colleagues, perform about 1,000 treatments each month. In 2017, 143 volunteer dentists from around the world performed 10,798 treatments, helping 2,700 kids in crisis and at-risk youth in Jerusalem. During the past 38 years, over 4,500 dentists have volunteered at DVI.

This was Dr. Missirlian's seventh time volunteering at DVI, since his first time in 2004.

"I enjoy every opportunity to come to Israel to work in this wonderful organization," he said. "They treat children and young adults, who otherwise would not receive dental treatment whatsoever, totally for free. They do not discriminate against anyone and have many children from different backgrounds, nationalities and religions. Personally, for me, it is a unique opportunity to give back in a small way to the people of Israel, my talents as a dentist. It is a true pleasure and allows me to contribute to the public good."

And each of these patients has a story, a reason why they live under the poverty line and their problems matter to DVI volunteer dentists. Missirlian is pictured with Elazar, a 22-year-old DVI patient who resides in the Ramot neighborhood of Jerusalem with his family. He is one of 12 children, most of whom have been DVI patients at some point during their lives. The family was referred by the municipal social welfare services to DVI. Elazar has been treated by our volunteer dentists since the age of seven. Coming from a religious family, Elazar studied in yeshiva during his youth. Once he reached his teen years, he experimented with a different lifestyle and left yeshiva. He drafted into the IDF and served on the border with Lebanon. His official job was that of "driver."

Although this doesn't sound very exciting, the army constantly struggles with a shortage of such personnel. Upon completing his army service, Elazar worked for a few months at a butcher store as he began to find his way in this post-IDF service time. Recently, he returned to yeshiva during the morning hours and has enrolled in a special English preparatory course at night. He realizes that he will need to do an entire year of academic preparatory studies in order to get accepted to a college degree program and has therefore already begun this journey with an intense English course. He also tries to earn some pocket money by doing odd jobs in his very little spare time. During the years Elazar has been a patient at DVI, in addition to check-ups, x-rays and oral hygiene treatments, he

has had numerous cavities filled and a number of extractions. While being soft spoken and gentle, he becomes passionate when praising DVI. He is ever grateful to the high level of professional dental care he receives, especially as it is delivered with kindness and genuine concern.

Dr. Missirlian runs Wiregrass Dental, a private dental practice in Enterprise and also serves on the Advisory Board of 3M. He may be reached at arthurmissirlian@gmail.com, or call 347-3061

The DVI clinic is actively looking to recruit more volunteer dentists, so if a working vacation in Israel sounds good, please email international@dental-dvi.org.il and schedule a trip today. Or for more information on DVI, visit <http://americanfriendsofdvi.org>.