

Dentist rescues her smile

By [Ron Wiggins](#)

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When we last saw Palm Beach dentist Mitchell Josephs in 2004, he had given me the most disgusting quote it has been my privilege to bring to your breakfast table:

"When teeth get septic and filled with pus, they not only make you sick, they get in your blood stream and can attack your heart valves and the lining of your arteries," Dr. Josephs said.

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Josephs was in a triumphant mood: he had just donated his services to treat the infected teeth of a Fort Pierce grandmother who was becoming too sick to care for her quadriplegic grandson. The doc's medical intervention not only spared the ailing grandmother further torment, it saved the state a ton of money in hospitalization costs for the child.

Now Josephs has done it again.

When Pamela Wiener, elder care and crisis manager for the West Palm Beach Housing Authority, saw the pitiful suffering of one of her clients, 58-year-old Sandra "Star" Robinson, who had missing and infected teeth, she sought out the Palm Beach cosmetic and reconstructive dentist.

"What medical coverage can poor people get for dentures?" Wiener asks. "Nothing. There are places you can go to get teeth pulled, but it is almost impossible to find a Medicaid dentist, and if you can find one, Medicaid usually doesn't cover dentures."

Wiener had seen the earlier story on Joseph's pro bono dentistry, and since no good deed goes unpunished, she ambushed him at their gym and asked whether he would donate another 20 or 30 hours of his service to one suffering poor person.

Josephs said yes, if somebody would pay the lab fees for dentures.

Wiener promptly reminded her husband of what happens when you marry a do-gooder.

"I went to my husband's work and got Environmental Engineering and Water Resources to donate \$1,000 for lab fees," she said.

Robinson, a certified nursing assistant, moved into public housing in 2002 after surgery for a brain aneurysm and a series of mini-strokes disabled her. Her first appointment with Josephs was in January.

Last week, she had her new dentures and she was jubilant.

"I can smile! I want to *meet* somebody. It has changed my life. I feel like a brand new individual."

Before Wiener got her to the dentist, Robinson was managing with "no upper teeth at all, not one," and many of her teeth missing in her jaws.

"All of her lower teeth were gone on the right side," Joseph told me later, "and the teeth she had left were rotten stumps."

With her dentures and repaired lower teeth in play, she is able to chew her food for the first time in years. "I was choking myself trying to eat."

Josephs later said: "Star will probably lose weight. People who can't chew tend to have terrible diets— soft food that they can get down."

Despite a host of medical conditions including degenerative spine and disc diseases and arthritic hips and knees, Robinson has been resolutely cheerful. Now she feels like living up to her "Star" billing, a nickname given her by friends.

"Since junior high, I've always had a beautiful smile — well, until I started running out of teeth," she said. "My trouble began with drills — couple of times when I was young I came out of the chair, it was so bad."

The story is a familiar one, Josephs said. "Of the 30 percent of the people who don't go to dentists, 99 percent had a bad experience as a child."

Robinson's dental plan was to wait until a tooth hurt so bad she couldn't stand it, and have it pulled.

Even with her upper dentures fully operational, Robinson has several appointments to go before her jaw has a full complement of lowers to go with her new uppers. Joseph will be testing her jaw bone to see if he can install implants to anchor a partial plate.

So who is it besides one Palm Beach reconstructive dentist who understands that there are people in desperate need of dentures and no means to get them without donated services?

"Three years ago when you (*The Post*) asked for a dentist to help Carnelia Buckins in Fort Pierce, I put my name in, figuring 40 or 50 dentists would also volunteer," he said. "I was surprised to learn that I was the only one."

One more quote from Joseph's "Star" patient, who followed me to my car in her electric scooter to deliver it.

"I am simply dumbfounded that Dr. Joseph would do this for me. I can't believe this is happening to me. I am truly blessed. Now you thank him in print for me! You got that? In print: thank you, Dr. Josephs."

Dr. Mitchell Josephs can be heard on WBZT (1230 AM) Tooth Talk, Friday at 1 p.m., and on Sunday at 4 p.m.