



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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***“Do you have
Macbeth?”***

-Asked by a young man at the Remote Area Medical clinic, in Grundy, Virginia, October 16, 2004

Several months ago I wrote a column about Remote Area Medical (RAM), a volunteer medical corps. Then, in July of this year, the Friends of the Albany Library hosted a chocolate chip cookie fundraiser, so that new children’s books could be purchased and distributed at one of RAM’s all day medical clinics.

With donations from friends, family and the community, we eventually ended up with about 225 new books, for toddlers through teens. And on October 16 and 17, the books were given out to rural, low-income families in Grundy, Virginia.

It was a wonderful and moving experience to be part of RAM for a few days. This organization is dedicated to helping families get the medical, dental and optical care they need. They provide the equipment and the hosting county provides a local coordinator and medical personnel, as well as funds for

housing and feeding the volunteers.

The Grundy event was held at an elementary school. The cafeteria became a dental clinic, where dentists were lined up, side-by-side, working on patient after patient. Teeth were filled, pulled and cleaned and root canals were performed. A mobile eye clinic was stationed outside the school and long lines of people waited to get eye exams and glasses on the spot. Smaller rooms in the school were devoted to inoculations, check-ups, hearing tests and general medical concerns. Everywhere I looked there were families waiting patiently to be seen and they moved from clinic to clinic, depending on their needs.

The lines actually started Friday evening, when people began to wait for the next morning’s registration, which started at 7. I arrived Friday afternoon and was greeted warmly by the RAM and local coordinators. In fact, the local

continued on page 2

county coordinator insisted on paying for my motel room, since I was officially part of the RAM volunteer corps.

When I came back early the next morning, dentist drills were already buzzing, glasses were already being made, and everywhere there were people sitting patiently, ready to wait all day if necessary. One of the RAM coordinators told me that many of the Grundy patients were people who had waited hours and hours at the Wise County, Virginia clinic, only to be turned away because there just wasn't enough time to see everyone.

I was given a long cafeteria table in the corner of the lobby and I laid out books on one side and bookmark-making materials on the other side. I then spent eight hours giving out books, and talking to parents, grandparents and children.

On the whole, the adults

came and went, and the children stayed. We made bookmarks and flip books and had discussions about books, life, teeth, school and California. The kids and the adults were warm and friendly – true southerners – and I felt lucky to be part of their lives for that short time.

The first day was the busiest and when I finally took a lunch break, it was the first chance I had to really talk to some of the hundreds of volunteers. There were medical professionals of all kinds, as well as students, retirees and everyone in between. There was even a group of college students from Notre Dame, who had spent 16 hours driving there (not counting the hours they spent lost).

I have never been part of such a huge and well-organized volunteer effort and I came away touched and impressed by the dedication, generosity

and kindness of everyone I met. Every patient was treated with courtesy, patience and true caring. It was an incredible experience and I hope to do it again and again.