



Dr. Wahl prepares for an extraction.

A DEDICATED HUMANITARIAN

St. Labre was blessed with a most unusual volunteer during the month of January, Dr. Mervin H. Wahl, D.D.S., a dentist of Wilmington, Delaware. He is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. He is of the Jewish faith.

Dr. Wahl, with his wife and three children, were here for the entire month of January. During that time the Doctor examined 135 of our children. He did 374 fillings, 44 extractions, and 26 prophylaxes. He took care of the dental work of the children from the 7th to the 12th grades.

It was remarkable that Dr. Wahl was able to do so much work with the antiquated equipment which we have. The lighting was very poor; there was no x-ray equipment; the drilling was done with a slow running cord motor. A hand water-bulb was used since we had no compressed air. Neither did we have a saliva ejector. Under these conditions, Dr. Wahl could only render what he considered emergency treatment.

Dr. Wahl has appealed for modern dental equipment so that the children of the Race of Sorrows can receive the same dental treatment which other American children receive.

The Doctor has not only promised to come back personally but he is also inviting dentists in private practice from all over the United States to volunteer their services.

Thank you, Dr. Mervin Wahl, and your good wife too. Do come back. God bless you and all your family.

Wilmington-area dentist volunteers

By MARK MARYMONT
Special to Crossroads

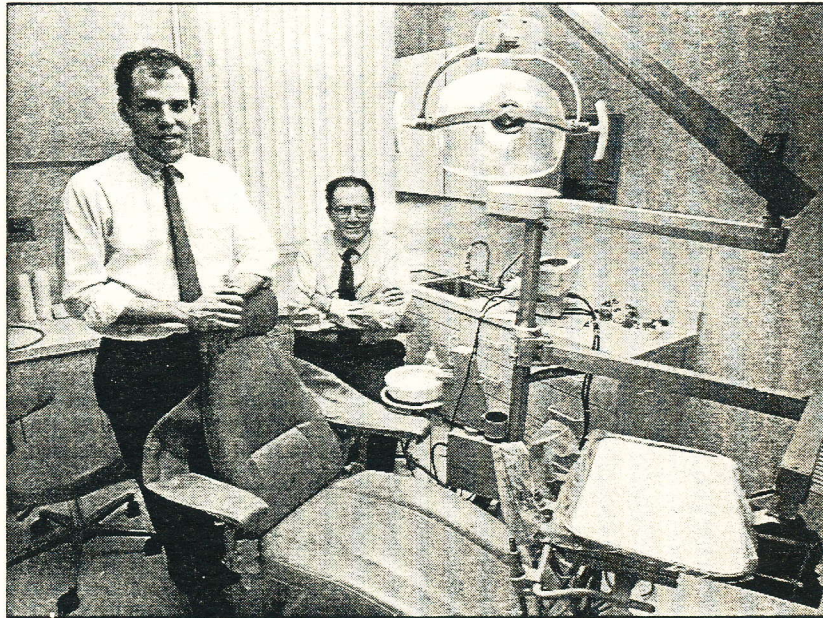
BRANDYWINE HUNDRED — Talk about a busman's holiday. When Michael Wahl took a break from his dentistry late last year, he went a long way from home, but he continued to work on teeth.

The 33-year old dentist, in business with his father, Mervin, and brother, Patrick, at Wahl Dental Associates in Independence Mall on Concord Pike, went to Thailand with a group of volunteers.

It was hardly a first for the Wahls. Mervin began volunteering his services on trips 30 years ago, working with American Indians in Montana.

"My wife [Joy] came up with the idea to do something charitable," Mervin Wahl said. "I talked to the people at Project Hope, which had a ship that went around the world, but they needed some specialists. During that time we had also been getting letters from a Catholic mission in Montana. They were always touching, and I would send a few bucks. Finally I contacted them and asked if they needed a dentist, and they really did."

Young Michael went on that 1965 trip, but as a 4-year-old he was little help to his father. When the senior Wahl went on other trips — to China, Chile, Africa



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LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON: Dentists Michael Wahl, left, and his father, Mervin, have treated patients in underdeveloped nations.

and India, Michael was either in school or too busy at the clinic. He finally decided he wanted to carry on the family tradition.

"I went to Thailand under the auspices of Feed the Children of Oklahoma City. They started these medical missions for children in 1979, going four times a year to some location," Michael said. "I had been looking for

about two years for a group to work with. Some of them wanted teachers, and I didn't want to do

that. Some other you to evangelize medical services, terested in that."

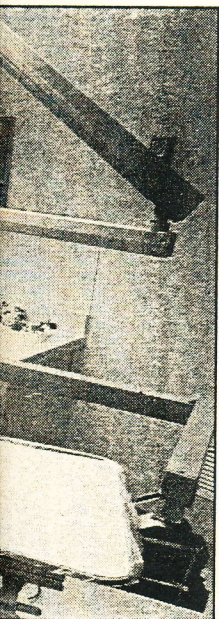
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Journal/FRED COMEGYS

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that. Some other groups wanted you to evangelize as well as offer medical services, and I wasn't interested in that."

Even though Feed the Children is staffed by born-again Christians, Wahl said there was no pressure to do any preaching when he was off duty.

"We would work all day with the kids, leaving a city and going out into the country in vans. Some of the villages were really remote, and the roads out there were in terrible condition. Sometimes we would have to leave the vans and walk in."

"Challenging" is how Wahl describes the conditions of many of the villages he went to. With no electricity or running water, about all he could do was treat peoples' existing dental conditions, concentrating on extractions.

"Most of the people that came seemed to understand what a dentist did," Wahl said. "We did have interpreters with us and the people were often in pain, so they were ready to be treated. We couldn't really do anything to

make them better in the future. Eventually, I would like to teach in places like that so local people can help these villagers.

"Many of the people there, especially the kids, had rampant cavities," Wahl said. "Despite that, they were easy to work with. Even the kids were relaxed, and they seldom complained. They live in pretty basic conditions, so there isn't a lot you can teach them about being sanitary."

One condition neither Wahl could treat in his overseas adventures was the sometimes dark-red color of their patients' teeth. Many Asians chew on roots or on betel nut, which discolors the teeth, giving them a reddish cast. "It doesn't seem to hurt their teeth, and many of them seem proud of the color," Michael Wahl said.

At 70, the senior Wahl is not

interested in more long-distance trips, but Michael said he would like to go again. "I'm not sure where I'll go next, maybe Central America in a year or so. There are a lot of people that need help with their teeth in those countries," he said.