



**Contact Information:**

Sean Rice  
507-535-5750 (days)  
507-279-0967 (evenings)  
[seanr@zumbromhc.org](mailto:seanr@zumbromhc.org)  
[www.zumbromhc.org](http://www.zumbromhc.org)

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Collaboration Makes Significant Impact on Community's Dental Care

**Rochester, Minn.** – An unlikely pairing of community mental health center and dental services provider is bringing dental care to Rochester's low-income and homeless populations. Through this collaboration, Zumbro Valley Mental Health Center and Apple Tree Dental have helped hundreds of individuals and families receive long-needed dental care.

"Many of our patients say they haven't visited a dentist in 5, 10 or 20 years," said Dr. SonjaMae Langton-Yanowitz, a dentist for Apple Tree Dental, a non-profit dental practice in Rochester. "Some have even said that this is their first visit for dental care in their lives."

Dental care has long been an issue for the minority, low-income and homeless populations served by Zumbro Valley Mental Health Center. There are a limited of area providers who offer dental services to these populations, which led to Zumbro Valley staff to seek alternative options to care for its patients.

"This is a need area we've been working on for a while," said Dave Cook, chief executive officer for Zumbro Valley Mental Health Center. "When we heard that Main Street Dental in Blooming Prairie would be closing, we saw that there would not only be a need for our patients, but for the community as a whole. At that point, we spoke with Apple Tree Dental about how we could expand services to meet this need."

Since January 2012, the number of patients seen by Apple Tree's dentists has doubled each month, with more than 500 people receiving services since the beginning of the year. These increases can be attributed to both the increased availability and the seamless process through which Zumbro Valley patients and the general population can receive appointments.

Cook noted that the organization has seen a similar increase of prescriptions dispensed through the in-house pharmacy, Qol meds.

Dr. Langton-Yanowitz said that many of the initial patients had significant dental needs due to their lack of adequate dental care. However, that is changing.

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“Many of the first patients can now focus on maintenance care for their oral health,” said Dr. Langton-Yanowitz. “This is a significant improvement from many of our first appointments that sometimes required more drastic measures.”

Jim Petrie is a prime example of this improved dental care and how the collaboration between Zumbro Valley Mental Health Center and Apple Tree Dental is benefiting the community. He is a patient at Zumbro Valley and heard about the new dental services being offered during an appointment.

“I first heard about the dental care from my case manager,” said Jim. “She said that dental services were being offered at the Zumbro Valley campus and then helped me make an appointment.”

He said that he was scared at first, but the dentist and hygienist were so friendly.

“I am just so grateful that I didn’t need to have teeth pulled,” he said. “Now that I’m able to see a dentist, I’m able to take much better care of my teeth.”

Although patients do not always have insurance, both Zumbro Valley and Apple Tree Dental staff regularly help these individuals obtain coverage for services. People without coverage also can work with Apple Tree Dental to determine a payment option that will work for them.

#### **About Zumbro Valley Mental Health Center**

Zumbro Valley Mental Health Center enhances the quality of life for residents in Southeastern Minnesota by serving as a community resource for the understanding and treatment of behavioral health and substance use disorders. The organization collaborates with government agencies, schools, non-profit groups and others to provide programs dedicated to improving the mental health of adults, adolescents and children. Zumbro Valley Mental Health Center is a private, non-profit organization serving Olmsted and Fillmore counties. For more information, visit our Web site at [www.zumbromhc.org](http://www.zumbromhc.org) or call 507-289-2089.

#### **About Apple Tree Dental**

Apple Tree Dental is a nonprofit dental organization that provides a comprehensive range of dental services for children, families, adults, seniors, long-term care residents and people with disabilities or special needs. Based in the Twin Cities, Apple Tree Dental has clinical programs in Coon Rapids, Fergus Falls, Hawley, Madelia and Rochester, and operates a mobile dentistry program serving more than 120 community sites in 29 Minnesota counties. For information on services provided by Apple Tree Dental’s Rochester office, call 507-424-1040. For information on Apple Tree Dental, visit [www.appletreedental.org](http://www.appletreedental.org).

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