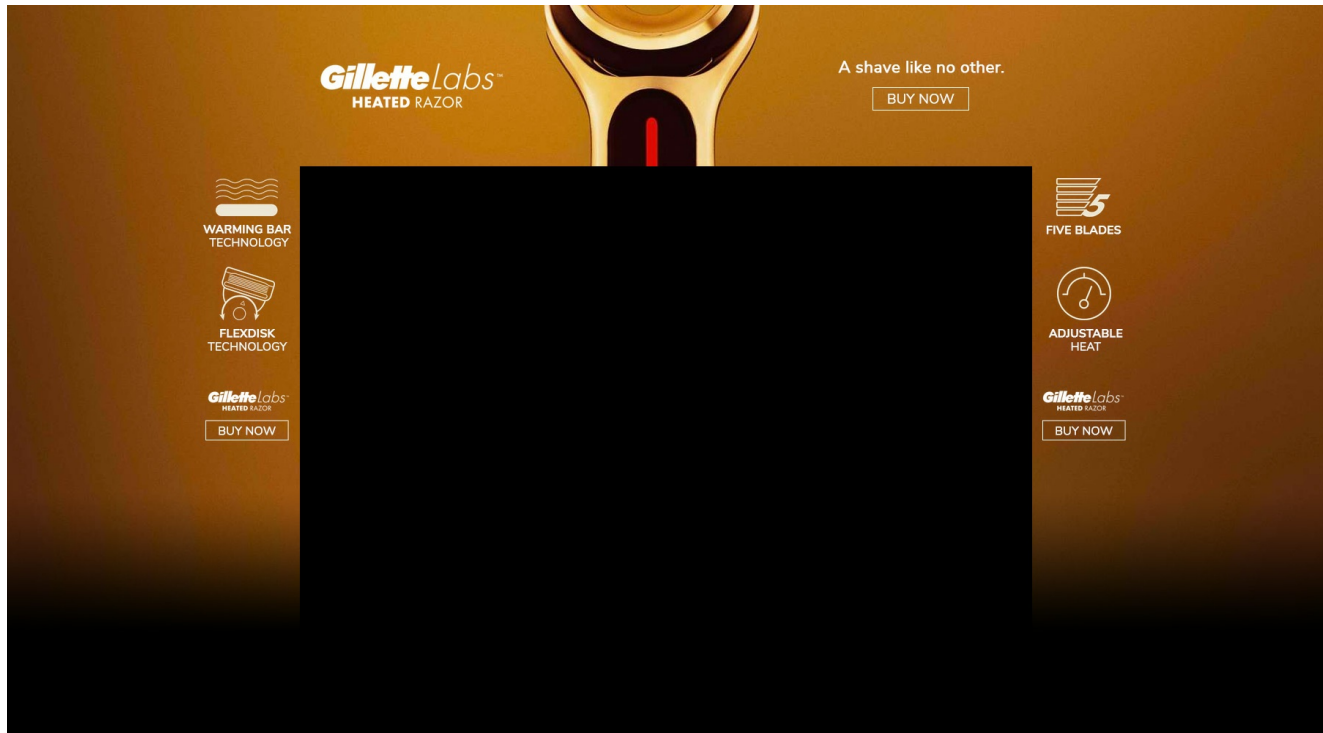


The power of a smile changes lives

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BY REP. BOB RAMSEY

Smiles are powerful things — they can signal friendliness or reflect happiness, and they often correspond to how we are treated when we walk into a room. Simply put, people are treated differently when they smile — and when they don't.

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Governor Bill Lee, in conjunction with the Tennessee Charitable Care Network, has proclaimed June 10-14, 2019, Tennessee Oral Health Smile Power Week. Smile Power Week was created to promote healthy smiles across Tennessee during National Smile Month, but many Tennesseans aren't smiling.

They struggle to find care they can afford, which leads to poor oral health and, as a result, trouble with relationships, trouble finding work, and a lower standard of living overall. According to research by the American Dental Association, 45% of low-income adults say they avoid smiling, and 68% of them sometimes find life in general less satisfying due to the condition of their mouths and teeth. So the question becomes, where can they find help?

Tennessee has been nicknamed the volunteer state since the War of 1812 when patriotic Tennesseans helped turn the tide at the Battle of New Orleans. In that same spirit of volunteerism, charitable dental clinics across the state go to work every day helping people who can't help themselves. They fill some of the gaps caused by a lack of Medicaid dental coverage, and they restore Tennessee smiles to make for a healthier, happier work force.

For the last two years, the state legislature has funded the Tennessee Dental Safety Net. Championed first by the late Representative Charles Sargent, the safety net provides funds to subsidize part of the cost of dentures and partials for low-income Tennesseans. These funds are administered at no cost by Delta Dental of Tennessee's Smile180 Foundation, and charitable dental clinics across the state use them to restore healthy smiles to individuals who qualify.

Seeing a patient who has struggled with their oral health turn around 180 degrees to a beautiful new smile is extremely rewarding. They can eat better, so their overall health is better, and a great smile shows confidence and gives the patient job prospects they might not have had before. Tennessee's charitable dental clinics are on the front lines making a difference every day, and they, too, need our help. They need help from local volunteers to staff the clinics, and they especially need dental professionals to volunteer their expertise so that they can keep creating smile success stories in our state.

(Bob Ramsey, D.D.S., is a Tennessee representative, who serves as chair of the House Public Service and Employees Committee)