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# REACHING NEW WORLDS

HAITI PROJECT



## DENTISTRY FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Seven years ago, after returning with his father from his first Haiti Project trip as a junior dental student, Joshua Bresler, DMD '03, was shocked that his 16-year-old sister, Rachel, was complaining about her first car's seat coverings.

"Rachel, are you crazy?" he told her. "We just came back from Haiti where the people have no food and no shoes and you're complaining about getting a car with cloth seats instead of leather!"

Now a junior dental student, Rachel understands. On a trip led by her brother and accompanied by her father, David Bresler, DDS '75, '79, and younger brother, Jason Bresler, DMD '06—Philadelphia area pediatric dentists and Temple faculty members—she spent the third week of March extracting teeth in eight Creole-speaking rural mountain villages in southwestern Haiti.

"I've never experienced anything so emotional," she says. "Most of the kids didn't have shoes, and they'd be standing by the side of the road at the top of a mountain in a torn tee-shirt and no underwear. That was hard, but the most amazing thing was that they were genuinely happy to see us."

This year's trip, the 13th annual Temple Haiti Project—includes Rachel Bresler and two other juniors who will serve as student leaders next year; seven seniors; the

Breslers and Tyler Twiss, DMD '05, of Highlands Ranch, Colo. Sometimes by SUVs that, on occasion, had to ford streams, and sometimes by plane, the Temple team headed out each morning. When they arrived as many as 100 people, some of whom had walked for hours, were waiting for them. Over the course of the week the Temple team extracted anywhere from one to 16 abscessed teeth from nearly 750 patients.

"We had to do some full-mouth extractions and it's very rewarding to be able to clear up these infections and get these people to the point where they're not living in pain every day," says Joshua Bresler.

And they did so under the most primitive of conditions, without lights, electricity, drills or suction, with patients often seated out in the open in lawn chairs. Says Josh Bresler, "The students' surgical and patient management skills get 10 times better every day and, especially with the junior students, between day one to day five or six they advance so much that you can't tell the juniors and seniors apart any more."



**GLOBAL OUTREACH**

“As a dental student you are so stressed out about getting good grades and then you go to a country like this where kids eat mud pies and the stresses that are bothering you seem so trivial.”

—JASON BRESLER, DMD '06



**Kelley Eltringham, a 2009 graduate, extracting a tooth.**



Photos clockwise from top left: Dr. Josh Bresler, the trip leader, hugging a child. Above right: Temple team members fording a stream in their SUV to reach one needy village. Below: The 2009 Haiti Project team members: (bottom row, from left) Haitian nurse Mish, Haitian translator Dasease, Dr. David Bresler and Haitian nurse Jacqueline; (middle row) junior Cate Timby, senior Danielle Green, senior Kelley Eltringham, junior Rachel Bresler and (kneeling) senior Colleen Scheive and junior Cory Johnston; (top row) Dr. Tyler Twiss, senior Dave Winans, Dr. Josh Bresler, senior Jeff Wallis, Dr. Jason Bresler, senior Jayme Mace and senior Mary Jo Massaro.

That's not all that changes, says his brother, Jason: "As a dental student you are so stressed out about getting good grades and then you go to a country like this where kids eat mud pies and the stresses that are bothering you seem so trivial."

This is a useful lesson for any dentist, adds his father, who led a number of previous trips. "Students get to see how the poorest people in the entire world live," says David Bresler. "Everybody also knows that there are poor people in the U.S., and this experience gives students the opportunity to see how important it is to help the underprivileged."

"In the Philadelphia area there are about 50 pediatric dentists and only three of us treat welfare children. That's a shame."

The annual Haiti Project trip is conducted under the auspices of the Haitian Health Foundation, whose founder and president, Jeremiah Lowney, DDS '61, is a Connecticut orthodontist. It is supported financially by Temple University, the dental school alumni association and student-run fundraising efforts, which include an annual 5K race. Henry Schein Inc. makes in-kind donations of dental supplies, including tooth brushes that the students distribute to Haitian villagers.

For more information, go to [www.templehaiticlub.com](http://www.templehaiticlub.com). To support next year's trip, please contact Gianna Fenimore, assistant director of alumni affairs and development, at 215-707-9005 or [gianna.fenimore@temple.edu](mailto:gianna.fenimore@temple.edu). ♦