At 91, a retired periodontist has spent years volunteering weekly to offer free dental care to those in need.

Long retired from his dental practice here in San Antonio, Dr. William Smith still helps people with their teeth. At 91, he has volunteered for 20 years to clean teeth for low-income and homeless people at San Antonio Christian Dental Clinic, an on-campus partner of the Haven for Hope homeless shelter downtown. “Some of them probably have never had their teeth cleaned,” says Smith, a resident at Independence Hill Retirement Resort Community in Stone Oak. “Some don’t even have a tooth brush. I’ve tried to impress on them to take care of their teeth.”

When he retired from his periodontist practice in 1996, Smith began volunteering to do dental surgeries for the homeless, but he reduced his work load to cleaning teeth, checking jaw bone levels on x-rays, and making night guards, which protect those who grind their teeth from wearing down their teeth enamel. He says that practicing dentists may not have as much time to volunteer as he has had. “I have enjoyed it down there,” he says.

Born in Iron River, Mich., in 1925, Smith came to San Antonio in the 1950s as part of his dental training, working at a local summer camp. Through a friend, he met his future wife, Maria Garcia, daughter of a local tortilla manufacturer, on a double date to the historic Menger Hotel. Once he returned to Michigan to finish dental school, he courted Maria long distance. When they married in 1955, he promised that if she’d move north while he finished graduate school, he’d eventually move with her back to South Texas. After eight years practicing dentistry in Michigan, he honored that pledge, starting his own practice in San Antonio and enjoying a long and happy, 57-year marriage. “I had a very lovely wife,” Smith says.

She died four years ago, and Smith lived alone at the couple’s home in Castle Hills until his recent move to Independence Hill. Their son, Michael, visits often from Austin, and Smith stays active. He swims up to four laps on visits to a local pool and goes to an exercise class on Mondays and Fridays at Independence Hill. “I still go out and whack at a golf ball for nine holes on Tuesdays,” he says.

And Smith has long reserved a half day for his volunteer work at the downtown dental clinic. He finally decided to retire from that role this past August, happy to have served countless patients in his long career of private practice and volunteer work.