



## Integrating dental care into primary care produces results

Victoria Ortman is one of many area residents being served at the Apple Tree Dental clinic located on the CHI St. Gabriel's Health campus. Thanks to a collaborative effort with Family Medical Center, many people who used to have to travel great distances to access oral health care services no longer have to do so.

A lot goes into producing a great apple. Years of genetics, cultivating a particular variety's characteristics to bring out its best qualities. This selective breeding process not only incorporates the desired qualities like color and taste, but also seeks to offset climate issues like growing season.

Such a planned approach usually produces the best outcomes. In January 2017, Family Medical Center (FMC) teamed up with Apple Tree Dental on a Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) grant to improve access to oral health care and integrate oral health assessment, prevention, and referral into patient visits at FMC, which is part of CHI St. Gabriel's Health.

**Victoria Ortman**, a Pierz native, is one person taking advantage of the improved access.

"I can't believe I found care like this," says Victoria. "Everyone working together to care for me has been wonderful."

This integrated approach to health care is nothing new at the medical center. An MDH-certified medical home, FMC has been focused on patient-centered care for the past several years. This approach places an emphasis whole-person care, rather than care based solely on a specific diagnosis or condition.

The mouth can sometimes be overlooked in patients, but good oral health is essential for overall health as well. Poor dental health

has been linked to diabetes, heart disease, respiratory illness, weakened immune system, and many more conditions.

Family Medical Center providers have taken steps to ensure dental needs are addressed, especially in patients with chronic conditions, like Victoria, who was able to access the dental care she desperately needed. After her oral health needs were identified in the clinic, she was referred to Apple Tree Dental for care.

"I hadn't been to the dentist in over a decade," says Victoria. "I was worried about my teeth, but finding oral health care has been an issue."

Victoria appreciates the convenience of being able to access oral health care close to home.

"Having Apple Tree Dental right here in Little Falls, on the same campus as the clinic, has been great," says Victoria. "It's a dental clinic with high standards and the atmosphere and staff are really positive."

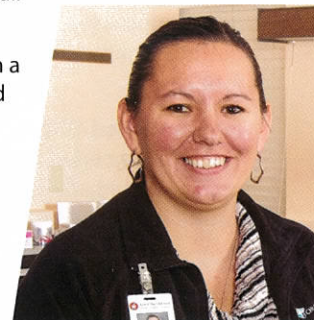
Victoria says the communication between the clinic and dental office enhances the collaboration. "My care coordinator knows about the dental treatments I'm receiving," says Victoria. "That helps in planning my overall care."

Victoria has come to enjoy her medical and dental visits. "I always feel cared for like family," she says. "Every time I walk in, I'm greeted with a big smile."

As a result of the whole-person care she is receiving, Victoria says her health outlook has improved greatly, spurred by a renewed sense of hope about her ongoing health needs.

"It's ironic, but there's an apple tree in my yard that in recent years has looked lifeless, but it surprised me this year by producing a bountiful crop of apples," says Victoria. "That the tree produced apples this year is symbolic of the hope I now feel for my health, thanks to the care I'm getting at CHI St. Gabriel's Health and Apple Tree Dental."

Sometimes you just have to look through a lot of varieties to find the right apple.



**Annette Brown**, clinic care coordinator for Apple Tree Dental, staffs the clinic Monday through Friday. Clinic hours for oral health patients are Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

*People interested in making an appointment at the Apple Tree Dental clinic, which has openings Thursdays and Fridays, can call 320-631-5653.*