Almost everybody lost teeth playing football without a facemask in the late 1940s. Grady Rogers played tackle in high school, and was no exception. He lost a single tooth, but at 79 years old, Rogers still has a mouthful and plans to keep them. He’s used an electric toothbrush for years because shoulder problems make manual tooth brushing difficult.

In February, MCG dental students started giving the Army veteran a hand with his oral care through a new School of Dentistry service project at the Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home.

“People are living longer, and more people than ever are keeping their teeth throughout their lives,” said the project’s faculty adviser, Dr. Kate Ciarrocca, an instructor in the Departments of Oral Rehabilitation and Oral Health and Diagnostic Sciences. However, as people age, medical complications and other factors can negatively affect oral health.

Ciarrocca added, “Our main goal here is to improve the quality of life for the veterans, and a healthier mouth can only lead to better health.”

Laurie Feeley, a Georgia War social worker for the past 17 years, said she’s seen the project’s immediate impact. “Our residents react phenomenally to the students,” she said. “They’re not only providing continuous dental care, but they’re also taking the time to listen to residents tell their stories and share their life experience.” It’s also worthwhile for the students, who get to treat a different patient population, and the nursing staff, who get extra hands to help provide care.

“We’re grateful the students chose to bring this special project to us,” said Kay Roland, director of nursing at Georgia War. “It’s going to make a world of difference for these patients to have their teeth or dentures cleaned in house by a dental student.”

Donations allow students to give the residents toothpaste samples and toothbrushes, but there are still needs to be met. Dentists for Della is funded by a $7,500 grant from the Mary Allen Lindsey Branan Foundation and sponsored by the MCG chapter of the American Student Dental Association. Patterson Dental donated supplies, including denture cleaner and repair products.

“ar the lack of larger equipment has hindered us from fully utilizing the number of students who want to volunteer,” Fulchi said.

Additional funding would enable the team to purchase a portable dental unit to expand from basic care to extensive dental cleanings and denture adjustments that can be done in patients’ rooms.

“We’ve gotten off to a good, productive start,” DeLeon said. “I’ve definitely seen how much this service is needed here.”

HOW TO HELP: If you’d like to make a donation, contact Dr. Ciarrocca at 706-721-2607 or kciarrocca@mcg.edu.