

# **Alton Veteran Talks Of Life-Changing Dentistry With TLC Offer For Dental Work And LCCC Help**

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**GODFREY** - A local disabled veteran will have plenty to smile about thanks to a generous gift from Dentistry with TLC in Godfrey and support from Veterans Services at Lewis and Clark Community College.

L&C student Matthew Edwards, a 52-year-old Desert Storm veteran who was born and raised in Alton, will receive \$30,000 worth of free dental work and a newfound confidence in his pursuit of a career assisting veterans like himself.

Edwards is earning an Associate in Applied Science – Administrative Assistant degree at Lewis and Clark, and is expected to graduate in the next year.

Prior to returning to college, he served in the U.S. Army for seven years, achieving the rank of sergeant E-5.

“I’ve been a disabled veteran since 2005 and I wanted to get back into the workforce,” Edwards said. “The VA had a program, which is Chapter 31 Vocation Rehab, so I went

to them and they had me look at some careers that would not interfere with my disabilities. One of those careers was administrative assistant. I'm hoping to work in the Veterans Administration helping other veterans."

Even though Edwards has been given a disability rating of 70 percent by the Veterans Administration due to injuries received during his military service, he is excited to reenter the workforce. However, problems with his teeth have always created confidence issues for Edwards, in addition to physical pain.

"To be able to smile when I'm talking to someone, a lot of times I feel I have to cover my mouth," he said. "Looking to do any kind of office work and deal with people, to me dental work is a must."

In recognition of Veterans Day, Dentistry with TLC took nominations to award \$15,000 in dental work to a veteran at no cost to him/her.

L&C Director of Veterans Services Terry Lane learned about the opportunity and immediately thought of Edwards, who ended up winning the prize.

"I'm still quite overwhelmed by it," Edwards said.

According to Lane, TLC added an additional \$15,000 in services in order to complete the work Edwards required, which includes upper and lower dental implants.

Edwards admitted he was nervous of the work due to his fear of needles.

"They have to stick you in your gums to deaden the nerves, but, actually, I was more afraid of the embarrassment," he said. "I haven't been able to afford dental work since I got out of the military in 1993. They're doing a very good job, so far. I haven't had a smile in almost 20 years, so it's a real blessing."

Edwards hopes his new smile, combined with the support he's received while pursuing his degree at Lewis and Clark, will help him achieve his dream of assisting veterans in the same way the school has assisted him.

"I really love the instructors here," he said. "I've been out of school for 30 years. It's been challenging and it's taken me longer to get my degree than I expected, but the teachers are working with me. They don't want to see you fail and I love that. They don't give it to you – they make you earn it – but they give you the opportunity to earn it."

Office Technology Professor Lori Kuithe is one of the people Edwards credits for helping him succeed.

“It’s her attention to detail when she’s giving her lectures,” he said. “She’s always available when you have questions at any time.”

L&C’s Veterans Services has played a key role in helping Edwards complete his education as well.

“I have access to a computer so I can do my homework,” he said. “It also helps me get familiar with the different forms used by veterans – the forms they need to get paperwork to get their records, to get medical, to get benefits. What I want to do in life is help veterans, so it’s helping me to learn the paperwork and the process of helping.”

Lane expressed his appreciation for the work Dentistry with TLC is doing to restore Edwards’ smile.

“When I saw the Dentistry with TLC offer in a local newspaper in early November, I was absolutely amazed,” Lane said. “Dr. Smith was making a life-changing offer to help a veteran, so I decided I would try to help her find a veteran student who could really benefit from the opportunity. Matt and I have talked about the cost of dental work but had not yet found a solution. When I heard that he would get this assistance, it was almost too much to process. Then, when I learned Dr. Smith would also donate another \$15,000 of dental work, I was stunned.

“Matt is getting ready to graduate and this dental work truly is a life-changing gift. I’m very happy for Matt and his wife, and I’m very grateful to Dentistry with TLC.”

Edwards credits Lane for not only helping him with his education, but for helping him get the dental services he required, but wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford.

“Terry is a big influence in my life,” Edwards said. “Working for him has been wonderful, not only from the learning aspect of office work, because he gives us jobs to do to help me learn office work, but just to watch his admiration and love for other veterans. He’s willing to go above and beyond for veterans, which he has done for me. I really look up to Terry. He is an example of how you help veterans.”

For more information on L&C Veterans Services, visit [www.lc.edu/veterans](http://www.lc.edu/veterans) or contact Lane at (618) 468-5500 or [tdlane@lc.edu](mailto:tdlane@lc.edu).