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## Clinic meets ‘special needs’

*Southern Orthopedic serves as ‘one stop shop’ for children*

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*Staff Writer*



**Matt Jones / Daily News**

Dr. James Bruce examines Jeremiah Ogletree, an 11-year-old with cerebral palsy.

Bruce and his coworkers at Southern Orthopedics hold a monthly clinic for special needs children.

Every few months Synda Ogletree packs up her youngest son, Jeremiah, along with his walker, his wheelchair and his toys, and heads for Atlanta to visit doctors. A neurologist. A cardiologist. A gastroenterologist. And the list continues.

But when it's time to see the orthopedist or check out Jeremiah's wheelchair or leg braces, Ogletree only has to travel down the street.

Once a month, Southern Center for Orthopedics shuts down its office for an afternoon and opens its doors to special needs children. Mothers, fathers and grandparents from Troup, Heard and Meriwether counties bring their children not only to see an orthopedic doctor, but also to meet with a physical therapist, nutritionist, wheelchair specialists and others.

During the December clinic hours, there is one more “specialist” in the group – Santa Claus comes to visit.

The clinic is coordinated through Children's Medical Services with District 4 Health.

“Without this clinic these kids would have to travel to Atlanta for another visit,” said Bill Johnston, director of the public health program for special needs children at District 4 Health. “They allow us to bring in other specialists so the families can see several different professionals at one time. It's a real time saver for them.”

Providing that one-stop shop atmosphere is why Southern Center for Orthopedics signed on almost ten years ago.

“District 4 came to us because they were having problems getting these children seen on a timely basis,” said Dr. Daniel Guy, orthopedic surgeon at Southern Center for Orthopedics. “Transportation was a big issue for these families. We took it on because the kids need to be seen whether or not we can provide the treatment. We wanted to make it more

convenient. It gives them a chance to come one place as opposed to going ten places. It can be tough enough to get them here.”

Last week 13 people were available to families for everything from nutrition advice to leg brace repair.

It makes a difference for Ogletree, who has been bringing Jeremiah, 11, to the clinic twice a year for most of his life. He was born eight weeks early and came home from the hospital with cerebral palsy. He’s had serious medical issues ever since.

“It’s just so convenient,” said the mother of three who works at night, goes to school during the day and cares for her sons in the afternoon.

Jeremiah Ogletree can’t walk without a walker and he can’t speak at all. His mother brought him to the clinic to check his legs and hips. He hasn’t been wanting to wear shoes, she told the doctor.

After X-rays and an exam, the doctor wondered out loud if her son just might not want to wear shoes.

“That’s a possibility,” admitted Synda Ogletree, a group leader at Twin Cedars.

Although her son weighs only 56 pounds, his feet are now dragging the floor when he sits in the wheelchair. Someone checked it out and told her Medicaid wouldn’t pay for another chair until September.



Tory Rosser, 15, helps his youngest brother, Jeremiah Ogletree, get ready for an X-ray while radiology techs Deedee Thomason, left, and Morgan Wells look on.

With wheelchairs costing as much as \$15,000, Ogletree can’t even consider buying one without insurance. After her visit, someone will make a call and see if a new wheelchair can be ordered before the three year minimum. Most of the children have Medicaid or Peachcare insurance, while a few have private insurance.

“But this isn’t a money maker for anyone,” Johnston said. “They don’t have to do this here. They just do this to help us out.”

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