

Teacher helps students with smiles - literally

'An excellent teacher, bubbly and happy,' Joan Degan makes dental hygiene training great at Algonquin College, as **TONY LOFARO** reports.

Joan Degan's choice of career was largely determined by two desires: To work with people and to be able to use her hands in the job.

So she chose to be a dental hygienist; not a glamorous profession, but one she's been successful at for 25 years.

"The mouth is the gateway to the body," she said, admitting a career as a dental hygienist is not for the squeamish.

She enjoyed her years in private practice, but left the profession three years ago to try teaching at Algonquin College's dental hygiene program, from which she graduated in 1976.

"It was difficult for me to leave private practice because of the rapport that you build with your clients. In my career, I only worked in two practices in the city, one for nine years and the other for 16 years," said Ms. Degan, 49.

She said no at first to leaving private practice for a full-time teaching job, even though she worked as a part-time instructor in the Algonquin program for almost nine years. She joined the college in 2001 on a full-time basis and became the clinical and continuing-education co-ordinator for the dental program. The move was a good one.

"I wasn't keen to just shuffle paper around, but I've found it's a really nice mix of paperwork, administration work, dealing with the students, some classroom and clinical teaching, and I

loved it," she said.

Ms. Degan has been recognized for her teaching and named one of 16 Ottawa recipients of the Capital Educators' Awards. She said the decision to enter the world of academia is not something she's regretted.

"It's wonderful seeing the students choose a career and watching them progress from start to finish when they're ready to go out and practice.

"They're your students one day and, when they graduate, they're your peers."

Ms. Degan's straightforward and friendly approach to teaching has won praise from colleagues and students.

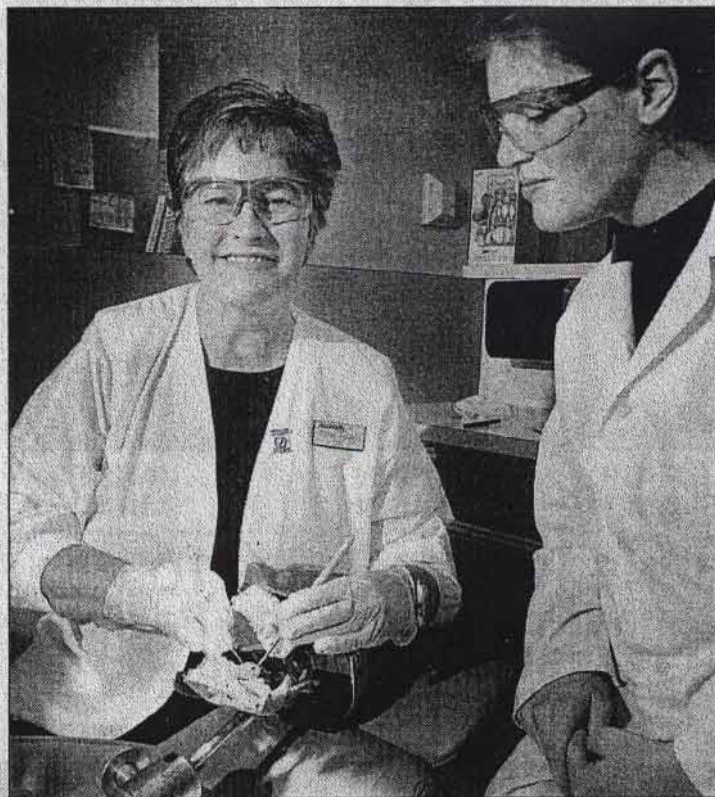
"Joan was an excellent teacher, bubbly and happy all the time. She really wanted us to do well," said Michelle Blackburn, 24, of Peterborough, who graduated last week.

"She motivated us to be the best at everything that we were taught. It made us realize as students that we can enjoy our profession for years to come because she's been a hygienist for 25 years."

She said many students often went to see Ms. Degan for extra help after school and sometimes sought her advice on personal problems.

"She wasn't only a teacher but she really did care about each student."

Jo-Ann Aubut, chair of the dental hygienist program at Algonquin, said Ms. Degan has fit



JEAN LEVAC, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Joan Degan shows a student how to get those teeth really clean.

EXCELLENT EDUCATORS

Sixteen special Ottawa teachers were recently honoured by their peers for outstanding contributions to all levels of their profession. The Capital Educators' Awards recognize people 'who have made a significant impact on the lives of their students by acting as role models, instilling confidence and nurturing leadership.' Students, parents and teachers

nominated 253 educators for the third annual event, organized by the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation. The awards recognize teachers working for publicly funded elementary or secondary schools, colleges or universities in the City of Ottawa. The 16 winners, who were honoured during the EduGala ceremony at Algonquin College, were chosen from 64 finalists. The Citizen is profiling each of the winners daily.

in nicely at the college. "She's very efficient, thorough and pleasant to work with, conscientious and very dedicated," said Ms. Aubut.

Ms. Aubut said Ms. Degan is "firm but fair" with students and they have respect for her as a professional.

Ms. Degan said the dental hy-

giene program is well-respected and its entrance standards are high. The college receives about 1,200 applicants per year but only admits 58 students.

"I feel really fortunate to work with a great team. We have great communication, we work as a unit and we all enjoy what we do. I think it shows in our work."