



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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‘Land of Smiles’ program teaches Illinois students how to keep teeth healthy
~Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation provides oral health program free to schools~

NAPERVILLE, Ill. — Jan. 9, 2012 — Illinois kindergarten through third-grade students will brush up on their dental health habits as they watch the heroic Tooth Wizard and his arch-enemy PlaqueMan battle for the health of kids’ teeth.

The two costumed characters will be at schools across Illinois as part of the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation’s “Land of Smiles” program – just one of the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation’s efforts to educate and improve the oral health of Illinois children. During the program, students will learn the importance of good oral health and how to properly remove plaque from teeth, which damages gums and causes tooth decay.

Although tooth decay is nearly 100 percent preventable, it is the most common chronic disease affecting children in Illinois.¹ Fifty-three percent of Illinois third graders have experienced dental cavities. Among those children, 29 percent have untreated cavities and 5 percent have cavities that need urgent dental treatment.²

“If we can help children understand the importance of good dental health and how to take care of their teeth at an early age, the benefits will last a lifetime,” says Lora Vitek, executive director of the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation. “This program is a fun way to get young kids excited about good oral health habits and helps further our mission to improve the oral health of people in Illinois.”

As part of the highly entertaining “Land of Smiles” program, students will help Tooth Wizard teach the proper way to brush by removing plaque left behind by PlaqueMan on an oversized mouth with a giant toothbrush. While PlaqueMan tries to disrupt the kids’ healthy habits, Tooth Wizard will show them how to floss, discuss good and bad foods for teeth and why it is important to visit his best friend – the dentist – at least twice a year.

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation will give kids who attend the program a goody bag containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and an oral health tip sheet, so they can practice what they learn at home.

And each participating school will receive a “Land of Smiles” curriculum kit to help reinforce good oral health habits with students. The kit has visual and audio educational tools, including a DVD, a CD, books and an oversized mouth model and toothbrush to demonstrate proper brushing techniques.

This year, nearly 30,000 kindergarten through third-grade students in more than 100 Illinois elementary schools will enjoy the “Land of Smiles” program. The program has reached nearly 150,000 students at more than 500 Illinois schools over the past five years.

“Recognizing that many children and their families do not know how to properly prevent tooth decay or are unable to get needed dental care,” says Glossy, “we support many groups and programs that provide oral health education and access for the people of Illinois.”

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation (DDILF) was formed in March 2008 by Delta Dental of Illinois (DDIL), a not-for-profit dental service corporation with a mission to improve the oral health of the communities it serves. DDILF is the charitable arm of DDIL and works to support and improve the oral health of people in Illinois. In the past decade, combined efforts of DDIL and DDILF have provided more than \$2 million to programs and organizations that provide oral health education and expand access to oral health care for Illinois residents. DDIL provides dental benefit programs to 4,800 employee groups throughout Illinois and covers two million employees and family members nationwide. DDIL and DDILF are based in Naperville, Illinois.

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¹Surgeon General’s Report on Oral Health in America, 2000.

²Illinois Department of Public Health, Healthy Smile Healthy Growth assessment, 2008-2009.