

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation
111 Shuman Boulevard
Naperville, IL 60563

Contact:
Liz Jans
Meyocks
Phone: 515-238-4304
lizjans@meyocks.com

Illinois students get a plaque-fighting lesson from Tooth Wizard

~Tooth Wizard offers parents tips to fight plaque at home~

(NAPERVILLE), Ill. — Jan. 7, 2015 — Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease,¹ and more than half of Illinois third graders have had at least one cavity.² In an effort to teach young Illinois children cavity-fighting oral health habits, the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation’s “Land of Smiles” program will visit Illinois schools this year.

The highly entertaining and educational program, provided free to schools by the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation, will teach pre-kindergarten through third-grade students how to properly remove plaque from teeth to fight cavities and help heroic Tooth Wizard defeat his arch-enemy PlaqueMan for the health of kids’ smiles.

During the “Land of Smiles,” the costumed characters will demonstrate the correct way to brush and floss teeth using an oversized mouth and toothbrush and teach kids why it is important to use a fluoride rinse and visit the dentist twice a year. While PlaqueMan tries to disrupt the kids’ healthy habits, Tooth Wizard will educate them about tooth-friendly foods and why it’s important to have sealants applied.

“We’re hoping to help decrease the number of young children with cavities by teaching them the importance of good oral health and how to take care of their teeth at an early age,” said Lora Vitek, director of philanthropy & community relations for the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation. “Land of Smiles’ furthers our mission to improve Illinois children’s oral health and gets kids excited about dental care.”

In order to keep PlaqueMan, and his “icky, sticky” plaque at bay, Tooth Wizard offers parents the following tips to help children practice good oral health habits at home:

- Children’s teeth should be brushed twice a day for at least two minutes each time.
- Once any two teeth are touching, children’s teeth should be flossed once a day.
- Sugary and starchy foods should be limited by reserving them for mealtimes.
- Sealants should be put on six-year and 12-year molars as soon as the teeth come in.
- Children should visit the dentist regularly.

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation provides kids who attend the program a goody bag containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and oral health tips explaining how to take care of their teeth at home. Each participating school will receive a curriculum kit to help reinforce good oral health habits in the classroom.

“By testing students before and after shows, we know that ‘Land of Smiles’ has a measurable impact on them. We think the program really resonates with the kids because it makes learning about oral health fun,” said Vitek. “By the end of each show, children are literally cheering ‘brush, brush, brush’ to help Tooth Wizard defeat PlaqueMan.”

This year, the “Land of Smiles” program will visit schools during spring and fall, reaching more than 31,000 pre-kindergarten through third-grade students in nearly 150 Illinois elementary schools. The program has reached nearly 240,000 students at more than 700 Illinois schools in the past eight years.

About Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation

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 501(c)(3) 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 individuals and more than 5,000 employee groups throughout Illinois and covers 2 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.