

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Illinois students help Tooth Wizard battle PlaqueMan for healthy smiles

Naperville, Ill. — Jan. 9, 2017 – Illinois pre-kindergarten through third-grade students will take a journey with Tooth Wizard and PlaqueMan to the “Land of Smiles,” an educational program provided by the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation that teaches good oral health habits to battle what the U.S. Surgeon General identifies as the most common chronic childhood disease — tooth decay.

Although largely preventable, more than half of Illinois third-graders have had at least one cavity¹, and according to the Delta Dental of Illinois Children’s Oral Health Survey, more than one in five Illinois kids ages 6 to 12 have missed school due to dental problems.

Students will laugh and cheer along as they help heroic Tooth Wizard defeat his evil nemesis PlaqueMan by learning the habits needed to have healthy smiles. Children will get involved in the fun during the interactive performance, helping demonstrate how to correctly brush, floss and use fluoride rinse causing PlaqueMan to scurry off the stage in defeat.

“‘Land of Smiles’ furthers our mission to improve the oral health of Illinois children by getting them excited to take care of their teeth,” said Lora Vitek, director of philanthropy and community relations for the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation. “The program helps us educate kids about the importance of good oral health habits at an early age, so they can make positive changes to their daily routines and get started on a path to a lifetime of healthy smiles.”

The free “Land of Smiles” program not only emphasizes good oral hygiene techniques, but also teaches children the importance of eating tooth-friendly foods, visiting the dentist twice a year and having sealants applied.

Tooth Wizard offers Illinois parents the following tips to help reinforce the same 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.
- Limit sugary and starchy foods but if consumed, have them during mealtimes when more saliva is produced to wash away bacteria from teeth.
- By age 1 or six months after the first tooth comes in, children should visit the dentist regularly.
- Parents should discuss placing sealants on their child’s teeth with their dentist. Typically, sealants are placed on six-year and 12-year molars to help protect them from tooth decay.

In addition to the oral health lesson, children who participate in “Land of Smiles” will receive an oral health kit with a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and a booklet packed with oral health tips. Schools will also receive a curriculum kit to help educators reinforce good oral health habits with students throughout the year.

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

The “Land of Smiles” program will visit schools this spring and fall, reaching about 38,000 pre-kindergarten through third-grade students in nearly 165 Illinois elementary schools. The program has reached over 290,000 students at more than 750 Illinois schools in the past nine years.

For those interested in requesting a “Land of Smiles” appearance at their school, visit landofsmilesil.org. For questions about “Land of Smiles,” please contact Lora Vitek at 630-178-4764 or lvitek@deltadentalil.com.

About Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation was formed in March 2008 by Delta Dental of Illinois, a not-for-profit dental service corporation with a mission to improve the oral health of the communities it serves. Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation is the 501(c)(3) charitable arm of Delta Dental of Illinois and works to support and improve the oral health of people in Illinois. In the past decade, combined efforts of Delta Dental of Illinois and Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation have provided more than \$3 million to programs and organizations in Illinois that improve the oral health of the residents of Illinois.

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¹Chicago Community Oral Health Forum, Healthy Smile Healthy Growth Assessment, 2013-2014.