

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Illinois Schools Transform into the “Land of Smiles” with Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation Program

NAPERVILLE, Ill. (September 19, 2016) – Sporting a sparkly silver and green robe and wielding a giant toothbrush as his wand, Tooth Wizard will help students defeat the evil PlaqueMan, at schools throughout Illinois. The wizard hero will lead the students on a journey into the “Land of Smiles,” the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation program that teaches pre-kindergarten through third grade children how to win the battle against tooth decay. Although largely preventable, tooth decay is the leading chronic childhood disease affecting children age 6 to 11, and according to the *2015 Delta Dental of Illinois Children’s Oral Health Survey*, nearly one in four Illinois kids ages 6 to 12 missed school due to a dental problem.

An interactive and all-engaging oral health lesson, the “Land of Smiles” program encourages students to laugh and cheer along as they learn the habits needed to maintain their healthy smiles. Children are able to get in on the fun during the interactive performance, demonstrating how to correctly brush, floss and rinse with fluoride, causing PlaqueMan to scurry off the stage in defeat.

“‘Land of Smiles’ furthers our mission to improve the oral health of Illinois children,” said Lora Vitek, director of philanthropy and community relations for Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation. “It’s all about prevention and education is vital to prevention. The engaging and interactive way of learning that ‘Land of Smile’ promotes goes a long way in not only making kids aware of how to care for their teeth, but also gets them excited about making changes to their daily routine to help ensure a lifetime of good oral health.”

The free program not only emphasizes good oral hygiene techniques, but also teaches children the importance of eating tooth-friendly foods and regularly visiting the dentist. As nearly half of Illinois children have had at least one cavity in the past year, the program aims to make a positive difference in preventing tooth decay in children and encourage enthusiasm for healthy habits.

“We quiz students on their oral health knowledge before and after the program, and we’ve learned from the results that ‘Land of Smiles’ has a measurable influence on the importance they place on oral health,” said

Vitek. “When students chant ‘brush, brush, brush’ to help Tooth Wizard defeat PlaqueMan at the turning point of the program, it’s clear that we’ve made learning about oral health fun and memorable.”

Tooth Wizard offers advice to help parents encourage good oral health habits for their children, too:

- Children should brush their teeth twice a day for at least two minutes each time.
- Once any two teeth are touching, children should floss their teeth once a day.
- Children should visit the dentist regularly, at least twice per year.
- Parents should discuss placing sealants on their child’s teeth with their dentist. Typically, sealants are placed on six-year and 12-year molars. A sealant is a thin invisible plastic coating that is applied to the molars to help protect them from tooth decay.

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

The “Land of Smiles” program will reach nearly 13,000 pre-kindergarten through third-grade students at 69 Illinois schools this fall. The program has educated more than 280,000 students at more than 850 Illinois schools in the past eight 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.

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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.