



NEWS RELEASE

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Delta Dental of Illinois Awards Scholarships to Further Oral Health Care in Illinois

Four Southern Illinois Dental Students honored for community outreach and volunteer work

NAPERVILLE, Ill. (May 13, 2016) – Delta Dental of Illinois today awarded scholarships to four students at Southern Illinois University (SIU) School of Dental Medicine. Blake Ferando, Kasey Kirchner, Thais Meredith and Eric Safranski received the scholarships in recognition of their outstanding work while pursuing dental degrees.

As part of its commitment to supporting local dentists and improving the oral health of Illinoisans, Delta Dental of Illinois recognizes outstanding dental students at Illinois schools each year who have demonstrated notable service and commitment to oral health in the state. These awards are given to students who plan to practice in Illinois, and serve as an incentive to encourage outstanding dental students to stay in the state and provide exceptional care. This year, Delta Dental of Illinois will provide \$10,000 in awards to five students who were selected by the Board of Directors of the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation, the 501(c)(3) charitable arm of Delta Dental of Illinois.

“It’s part of our mission to improve oral health in Illinois, and that can only happen if our citizens have access to top oral health professionals,” Bernie Glossy, president and CEO of Delta Dental of Illinois

said. “Today’s dental students are the future of dental care in our state, and Delta Dental of Illinois is dedicated to supporting their training through these awards.”

During his studies, **Blake Ferando, of Bunker Hill, Illinois**, shared his skills through community service work both at home and abroad, including seven years of work with Give Kids a Smile, an organization that connects children vulnerable to dental disease to dental care. After graduation, Ferando will work in The Maple Street Dental Clinic, a Federally Qualified Health Center in Gillespie, Illinois.

From the time she was in junior high, **Kasey Kirchner, of Mulkeytown, Illinois**, aspired to be a dentist. While at SIU, Kirchner served as student body president, conducted research on pain modulators in dental pulp and participated in events focused on children’s oral health and education. After graduation, Kasey will pursue a one-year program in Advanced Education in General Dentistry, after which she plans to return to Mulkeytown to practice.

Thais Meredith, of Alpha, Illinois, first decided to become a dentist while serving in the U.S. Army. Since enrolling at SIU, she participated in extensive community services projects, including volunteering to provide dental services to underserved populations and teaching about oral health at a nursing home and a women’s shelter. After graduation, Meredith plans to become an associate in an Aledo, Illinois dental practice.

Eric Safranski, of Peru, Illinois, was inspired to pursue dentistry by working in his uncle’s practice and motivated by his personal convictions to share his skills with the community. While at SIU, Safranski pursued opportunities to share his dental skills with the community as a volunteer while also committing to extra training in oral surgery. Safranski was admitted to Loyola University’s Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery program and will continue his training there after graduation.

“These students have demonstrated exceptional dedication to their studies and to their communities,” Glossy said. “We are impressed with their commitment to serve those who need dental care most urgently and to improving oral health in Illinois.”

Scholarship recipients must have passed their National Board exams and plan to practice in Illinois. Additionally, they must demonstrate an interest in community outreach, have completed research on the improvement of oral health in a community or have declared interest in the pediatric dentistry specialty. In addition to the four SIU recipients, University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry student Mollie Rojas received a scholarship.

About Delta Dental of Illinois

Delta Dental of Illinois (DDIL) is a not-for-profit dental service corporation that provides dental benefit programs to individuals and more than 5,000 employee groups throughout Illinois. DDIL covers 2 million individuals, employees and family members nationwide. DDIL is based in Naperville, Illinois and offers single-site administration and client services.