

Delta Dental of Illinois awards SIU School of Dental Medicine students scholarships to further oral health care

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EDWARDSVILLE - Four **Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM)** students have been awarded scholarships from Delta Dental of Illinois (DDIL) in recognition of their outstanding community outreach and volunteer work while pursuing dental degrees.

As part of its commitment to supporting local dentists and improving the oral health of Illinoisans, DDIL 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, DDIL will provide \$10,000 in awards to five students who were selected by the Board of Directors of the DDIL Foundation. Four of the five recipients are SIU SDM students, including Blake Ferando, of Bunker Hill; Kasey Kirchner, of Mulkeytown; Thais Meredith, of Alpha; and Eric Safranski, of Peru, Ill.

“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,” said Bernie Glossy, president and CEO of DDIL. “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.”

“The Delta Dental of Illinois scholarship award recipients represent great examples of the high caliber of professionals who will soon be providing health care for present and future generations,” said Bruce Rotter, DMD and dean of the SIU SDM. “We are extremely proud of our students, and we are grateful to Delta Dental of Illinois for both recognizing and rewarding their accomplishments.”

During his studies, Ferando 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.

From the time she was in junior high, Kirchner aspired to be a dentist. While in dental school, 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.

Meredith first decided to become a dentist while serving in the U.S. Army. Since enrolling in dental school, 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 a dental practice located in Aledo.

Safranski was inspired to pursue dentistry by working in his uncle's practice and was motivated by his personal convictions to share his skills with the community. While in dental school, 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 the National Board Dental Examination 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.

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.

[The SIU School of Dental Medicine](#) students manage approximately 35,000 patient visits each year at its patient clinics in Alton and East St. Louis. In addition, students offer oral health treatment, screenings and education to more than 10,000 people annually through a wide variety of off-campus community outreach events. These opportunities provide students the training they need to graduate and become highly skilled dentists. The School of Dental Medicine is a vital oral health care provider for residents of southern and central Illinois, and the St. Louis metropolitan region.