

Hundreds receive free dental care at Mission of Mercy Event

by Megan Weiser
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COLLINSVILLE - The Gateway Convention Center in Collinsville was abuzz during the Illinois State Dental Society Foundation's Mission of Mercy event held Friday-Saturday, July 15-16.

Faculty, students, alumni and staff from the Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) were among the numerous volunteers who worked to provide free dental care, valued at more than \$1 million, to approximately 1,400 children and adults.

[View a video of the event here.](#)

“This was our fourth mission in Illinois,” said **Darryll Beard, DMD**, event co-chair and SIU SDM alumnus. “All of the other missions have been mainly to the north, including Bloomington, Grayslake and Peoria. We’ve always seen the need to have one here.”

“Our goal for treatment was to address the patient’s most significant dental need,” explained Randall Markarian, DMD, event co-chair and SIU SDM alumnus. “The services that we provided were cleanings, fillings, root canals, extractions, pediatric care and some partial dentures.”

Patients traveled from Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Iowa and Kentucky to receive much-needed dental treatment.

“I brought the whole family out,” said Arianna, a mom of two from Swansea. “My kids and my husband are here, and we’re all getting our teeth cleaned. We just want to make sure we have good dental health.”

“As a pediatric dentist, my heart is here to make sure that the kids are treated,” said Kenneth Rawson, DMD, SIU SDM faculty member and alumnus.

The free clinic cost approximately \$120,000 to execute and relied heavily on donations, volunteers and a supportive dental community.

“If the person’s in pain, that can affect everything to do with their life,” said Debra Schwenk, DMD, MPA, SIU SDM faculty member and alumnus. “It’s so rewarding to see the patients come through here and get the help they need. They’re so thankful.”

[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.