

# SIU School of Dental Medicine Celebrates Opening its Doors 50 Years Ago

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EDWARDSVILLE – Southern Illinois University’s School of Dental Medicine (SDM) is celebrating its opening 50 years ago having welcomed its first class of 24 students on Sept. 11, 1972. SIU SDM was the first dental school to open outside of the Chicago area and helped fill the need for dentists in the central and southern Illinois regions.

The SIU SDM was dedicated on Oct. 3, 1972, with an event welcoming the governor's wife, state senators and representatives and area dentists to the Alton campus.

At the dedication, the school's first dean, Frank Sobkowski, DDS, remarked, "Because of the unusual opportunity extended to the faculty of this school and by virtue of the efforts of the graduates of our programs, this school will achieve national eminence and will provide leadership for the future."

"I wish Dean Sobkowski could see the dental school as we have indeed grown and surpassed even his expectations," said SIU SDM Interim Dean Duane Douglas, DMD. "We are a leader in dental education that continues to improve the oral health of the region and break through the barriers of access to care. He would be proud of our students' 100% pass rate on the National Dental Board Exams, the opening of our Advanced Care Clinic, and the expansion of our educational programming, providing specialty training for graduates to become endodontists and orthodontists."

The school's first enrollee, Dean Drake, DMD, chose to delay his dental school journey just so he could be part of the first class at the SIU SDM. His experience at SIUE as an undergraduate student confirmed that dentistry was the career path he wanted to pursue and only at the SIU SDM.

"I am extremely proud of the SIU SDM today just as I was 50 years ago," said Drake. "The SIU SDM has grown to become one of the top schools in the county. The technology available to the students today is amazing."

Drake enjoys reminiscing on his experiences at the school like him and his classmates enjoying a snow day that was spent connecting with faculty even though they did not have to be in class that day. He even appreciated the times that required some ironing out as the new school started to build its foundation.

"One of my favorite pictures I took was on our first day of clinic," said Drake. "One of my classmates is assisting another by shining a light in the patient's mouth because the operatory lights had not yet been installed. Those first few years were a little shaky, but it shows how much the school has grown and progressed since those first years."

Cohorts at the SIU SDM have grown from the original class of 24 students to a larger and more diverse student body of 212 students pursuing their DMD.

"It is important to acknowledge where we are, where we started, and moreover, aspire to where we will go as we continue to prepare and graduate some of the best dentists in the county," Douglas concluded.

SIU School of Dental Medicine students manage approximately 35,000 patient visits each year at 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.