

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **For Immediate Release**

#### **Illinois Kids Learn Good Oral Health Habits from Tooth Wizard, PlaqueMan** ~Delta Dental of Illinois provides free theatre program to improve kids' oral health~

**January 11, 2010** – Illinois kindergarten through third-grade students will learn how to take care of their teeth and the importance of good oral health from Tooth Wizard, as he battles his nemesis PlaqueMan, during Delta Dental of Illinois' "Land of Smiles" program at 100 Illinois elementary schools January through May.

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease affecting children in Illinois.<sup>1</sup> According to a survey by the Illinois Department of Public Health, 55 percent of Illinois third graders have experienced dental cavities. Among those children, 30 percent have untreated cavities and 4 percent have cavities that need urgent dental treatment.<sup>2</sup>

"Since most tooth decay is preventable, we know it is important to start educating children about good oral health habits at an early age," said Tom Colgan, president and CEO of Delta Dental of Illinois. "This program inspires a lifetime of good oral health habits and helps further our mission to improve the oral health of the communities we serve."

"Land of Smiles," sponsored by the not-for-profit Delta Dental of Illinois, is a highly entertaining theatrical performance in which costumed characters Tooth Wizard and PlaqueMan educate kids on how to get rid of what Tooth Wizard refers to as that "icky, sticky, slimy, grimy, sort of yellowy, greeny gunk" – known as plaque – which causes cavities and damages gums.

Student volunteers will help Tooth Wizard and PlaqueMan demonstrate proper brushing techniques and how to floss using an oversized set of teeth and toothbrush. The characters will also discuss good and bad foods for teeth and why it is important to visit the dentist at least twice a year.

To further improve their oral health, kids who attend the program will receive a "dental treat" bag containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and an oral health brochure explaining the importance of good oral health.

Also, each school will receive a "Land of Smiles" curriculum kit to help reinforce good oral health habits with students. The kit includes visual and audio educational tools, including a 12-minute video, an audiocassette tape, books and an oversized mouth model and toothbrush to demonstrate proper brushing techniques.

This year, nearly 30,000 kindergarten through third-grade students in 100 Illinois elementary schools will enjoy the "Land of Smiles" program. The program has reached a total of 100,000 students over the past three years.

*Delta Dental of Illinois (DDIL) is a not-for-profit dental service corporation specializing in providing comprehensive, easy-to-use and cost-effective benefits to 1.6 million employees and family members in more than 3,600 employee groups throughout Illinois. Based in Lisle, Ill., DDIL offers an array of extensive nationwide network-based managed fee-for-service, PPO and dental HMO plans.*

-###-

<sup>1</sup>Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health in America, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>Illinois Department of Public Health, Healthy Smile Healthy Growth assessment, 2003-2004.