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Contact Information for United Way of Greater Duluth:

Paula Reed, President

preed@unitedwayduluth.org

Phone: 218-726-4790 • Fax: 218-726-4778

Contact Information for Delta Dental of Minnesota:

Heather Hofmeister, Senior Corporate Communications Specialist

hhofmeister@deltadentalmn.org

Phone: 651-994-5210 • Fax: 651-406-5975 • Cell: 612-202-9159

Smiles Across Minnesota Expands Program to Duluth

School-Based Dental Program Targets Duluth Head Start and Elementary School Children

Duluth, MN (January 22, 2008) – Smiles Across Minnesota expands its statewide preventive dental program to Duluth public elementary schools on January 24. The program will help improve the oral health of low-income and uninsured children. Smiles Across Minnesota provides children ages three to 12 with preventive dental services – including cleanings, fluoride treatments and sealants – right within the schools.

The Community Impact Report, published by the United Way of Greater Duluth, documented the critical need for accessible dental services for uninsured or underinsured children in the Duluth community. “When Delta Dental of Minnesota and Children’s Dental Services brought the Smiles Across Minnesota program to us, we realized it fit the exact need of this community and ensures children in Duluth public schools have their oral health needs met,” said Paula Reed, president of United Way of Greater Duluth.

“Smiles Across Minnesota allows us to serve a large number of students who may not have access to regular preventive as well as restorative dental care,” said Dr. Keith Dixon, superintendent of the Duluth Public Schools. “Community based programs are cost-effective. Children receiving dental sealants in school-based programs have 60 percent less decay for up to five years. This program provides an additional tool that supports good oral health for students who are most in need. We anticipate serving over 1,000 children in the first year.”

Dental services will be offered to all students at participating schools and administered by a local hygienist from Children’s Dental Services. “Preventive measures, such as education, sealants and fluoride treatments, have a long-term impact on a child’s future dental health and well-being,” explains Sarah Wovcha, executive director of Children’s Dental Services and co-chair of Smiles Across Minnesota.

Uninsured students who are income-eligible will receive free care through the program.

(more)

“We are excited to bring this successful, national school-based program to Duluth,” said Ann Johnson, director of community affairs at Delta Dental of Minnesota, and co-chair of Smiles Across Minnesota. “Our goal was to create a model that can be tailored to fit the community’s specific needs. We are thrilled that Duluth is our first expansion site outside of the Twin Cities.”

“Smiles Across Minnesota is the standard for how all Smiles Across America programs should operate,” said Sue Dodd, director of programs at Oral Health America. “Smiles Across Minnesota is successfully expanding its model throughout Minnesota – identifying needs and eliminating barriers to care and education.”

Smiles Across Minnesota – Duluth is a joint effort made possible by Delta Dental, Children’s Dental Services, United Way of Greater Duluth and the Duluth Public School District. Delta Dental of Minnesota, United Way of Greater Duluth, Generations Health Care Initiatives, Northland Foundation and St. Louis County Public Health and Human Services, have all provided financial support for *Smiles Across Minnesota – Duluth*.

About **Smiles Across Minnesota** – Delta Dental of Minnesota and Children’s Dental Services launched the *Smiles Across Minnesota* coalition in 2006, in conjunction with Oral Health America’s Smiles Across America program. *Smiles Across Minnesota* is one of the most successful coalitions of Oral Health America’s Smiles Across America program, which focuses on providing school-based dental care to low income and uninsured children.

Oral Health America is a national oral health advocacy organization whose mission is to increase public awareness of oral health's importance to total health. Oral Health America established the Smiles Across America program in 2004 to provide preventive dental care to uninsured children in school-based settings. Companies who support the national program include Oral Health America, 3M ESPE, Patterson Foundation, GC America, University Bank, Ronald McDonald House Charities, Sunstar Butler, Dentsply, and DNNTLworks among others.

About Delta Dental of Minnesota

An innovator in oral health benefit plans, Delta Dental of Minnesota is an independently operated, nonprofit dental services company that administers self-insured and prepaid dental service plans. Delta Dental serves more than 8,200 employer groups with over 3.1 million members in Minnesota and across the nation. Delta Dental of Minnesota’s oral health education, community outreach and philanthropic program focuses primarily in the area of oral health education and prevention. Other major initiatives under this program include supporting Children’s Dental Services, a nonprofit agency providing accessible dental care through clinic and school-based settings and education to more than 11,000 uninsured and underinsured Minnesota children, and funding Head Start’s Oral Health Risk Assessment program, a grassroots effort to raise awareness on the importance of oral health and oral disease prevention targeting 30,000 Minnesota families.

Delta Dental of Minnesota is headquartered in Eagan, and has a customer service center on Minnesota’s Iron Range. For more information about Delta Dental of Minnesota, visit www.deltadentalmn.org.