

PAYING IT FORWARD

Petersburg dentist mentors the next generation.



TWO YEARS AGO, Petersburg dentist Dr. Lori Wilson was concerned about declining minority enrollment in dental schools, particularly among African-Americans. “There weren’t many black dentists coming behind us,” says the 48-year-old, “not as many as we want.”

So Wilson, who is president of the Peter B. Ramsey (PBR) Dental Society (a local chapter of the 101-year-old Old Dominion Dental Society), decided to do something about it: She joined with fellow society members to create a mentorship program designed to support underrepresented students during the dental school application process. “By being there and showing them the way,” explains Wilson, “we want to help them be successful in their dream of becoming a dentist.” In April, the Old Dominion Dental

Society—an organization first established to support minority dentists that is today recognized for its commitment to community service—named Wilson “Dentist of the Year” for her dedication, hard work and contributions to the organization and the profession of dentistry.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, Wilson and other volunteer dentists worked with 15 college students and one high school student, providing them with tutoring, college guidance, lessons in business etiquette, shadowing opportunities at dental offices and study materials for the Dental Admission Test (DAT).

“We give them resources so they will know what they need to do to get into dental school,” says Wilson.

The mentors also connect the students with scholarships and summer medical and dental enrichment programs—competitive initiatives that grant selected students free tuition for a summer of classes, a living stipend and a chance to gain real world experience working in clinical settings. (Wilson, who has been practicing in Petersburg for nine years, participated in a similar program at Tulane when she was a student.)

Recently, one of the program’s first students was accepted to dental school. Today, Wilson and her colleagues continue working with several other students still trying to gain admission, reviewing their entrance exams and offering encouragement. Wilson says she tells the students “not give up on their dreams, just because they didn’t get in the first time.” OldDominionDentalSociety.org By Sandra Shelley



Brushing for Your Life

VCU researchers fight disease-causing bacteria.

Ever thought brushing your teeth would make for a healthier heart? Poor oral health is linked with overall systemic health—in particular, cardiovascular health. Now, scientists at VCU’s Philips Institute for Oral Health Research in the School of Dentistry have discovered, in a joint study with MIT, that the oral bacteria causing certain types of heart disease need manganese, a metallic element, to survive in the human bloodstream—a

Dr. Todd Kitten with his research team at VCU’s Philips Institute.

discovery that may help find new ways to combat these bacteria. *Streptococcus sanguinis* lives in the mouth, but if it gets into the bloodstream of a person with a pre-existing heart condition, it can cause infective endocarditis—a rare inflammation of the heart tissue with a fatality rate higher than 20 percent. Now, by identifying the bacteria’s need for manganese, Dr. Todd Kitten, the VCU Dental School associate professor who led the study, and his research team have identified a new way to fight infective endocarditis. Because the human bloodstream contains very little manganese (the human mouth contains more), these invaders must use a transporter protein to “steal” manganese from the blood.

Says Kitten, “These proteins would be good targets ... with funding from the American Heart Association, we’re looking at drugs to attack that transport protein, so that the bacteria won’t be able to live in the bloodstream.”

PhilipsInstitute.VCU.edu By Taylor Pilkington

Magic Man

Alexandria orthodontist shares the art of illusion with his patients.

The new president of the Virginia Association of Orthodontists is certain to have some tricks up his sleeve. Dr. Herbert Hughes of Alexandria, a popular national speaker and a talented magician who performs at local charitable events, has combined his love of illusion with a thriving dental practice.

“The magic started about 22 years ago, when I was playing cards with

another dentist [Dr. Rick Stone of Alexandria],” he says. “I said, ‘Rick, do you know any card tricks?’” Hughes only knew one, but resolved to learn a few more by the next time they played cards together. He visited Al’s Magic Shop in D.C. and picked up some card tricks, then later expanded his repertoire.

Following the theme of “There’s Magic in Your Smile,” the walls of his office are covered with framed posters of Harry Houdini (who shares his initials) and other magicians. He pulls wooden nickels out of the ears of new patients and also takes the occasional break to perform a “trick of the month” for them

at his magic stand. “It’s a way of breaking the ice with new patients ... it diffuses the anxiety that a patient might have,” he says.

The magic is working—he’s in the process of expanding his office to accommodate the arrival of his son, Justin, the family’s fourth generation to go into the dental field. Hughes, 56, started practicing in 1986 with his father.

Hughes sees connections between his two interests. “When a patient gets their braces off, and they see their smile for the first time ... it’s a time for celebration, and it can be a magical moment.” HughesOrtho.com

By Sandra Shelley

