

ECU Dental School Earns National Innovation Award

By Administrator

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The national organization representing all U.S. and Canadian dental schools announced the 2019 award for innovation will go to the School of Dental Medicine at East Carolina University. It is the first national honor to recognize the university for its breakthrough approach to providing practical experience for future dentists through rural service-learning centers across North Carolina. The American Dental Education Association's (ADEA) ADEAGies Foundation® said the ECU dental school is a recipient of the William J. Gies Award for Vision, Innovation and Achievement, in the Innovation category. The mission of the foundation, which is the philanthropic arm of the ADEA, is to enhance oral health through transformational advances in dental education, research, leadership and recognition. The annual Gies Award honors individuals and organizations who exemplify the highest standards in oral health and dental education, research and leadership.

"There are great things happening in academic dentistry throughout the United States and Canada, but we don't always take the time to recognize that," said Dr. Richard W. Valachovic, president and CEO of the ADEA. "The Gies Award is a wonderful reminder of our colleagues' innovative work in dental education and how they are improving the lives of the individuals we are committed to serve."

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The ECU School of Dental Medicine earned the designation for strategically placing eight state-of-the-art service-learning centers in rural and underserved communities across North Carolina where dental students and residents can hone their skills. The centers and on-campus dental clinics have treated nearly 60,000 patients since the first center opened in 2012—many of whom previously had little or no access to dental care.

"Our school is founded upon the promise to make oral health care more accessible to all North Carolinians, and our eight community service-learning centers are creating smiles and providing students with invaluable experience," said Dr. Greg Chadwick, dean. "The Gies Award is affirmation that our strategy of immersing our talented faculty, students and residents in the communities that need us most is working."

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The community service-learning centers—overseen by faculty directors who establish roots as active members of these communities—treat patients while providing students and residents vital education and hands-on clinical experiences.

“The Gies Award is confirmation once again that ECU is excelling at serving underserved communities across North Carolina while at the same time preparing our students for success in their chosen careers,” said ECU Chancellor Dr. Cecil P. Staton. “Our service-learning centers provide talented and well-prepared dentists for North Carolina while lifting up the communities they serve.”

Last year, the UNC Board of Governors awarded Chadwick the 2017 Gov. James E. Holshouser Jr. Award for Excellence in Public Service. That honor focused on the efforts of Chadwick and the School of Dental Medicine to improve the quality of life for North Carolina’s citizens.

The school’s community service-learning centers are based in Ahoskie, Brunswick County, Davidson County, Elizabeth City, Lillington, Robeson County, Spruce Pine and Sylva. Fourth-year dental students complete nine-week rotations at three different centers to experience a range of patients and cases and to live in diverse communities as they learn.

The School of Dental Medicine graduated its first class in 2015 and now boasts more than 200 alumni. While many of those are in the process of completing dental residencies or military obligations out of state, 71 percent are already practicing in North Carolina.

The 2019 Gies Awards will be presented on March 18 in tandem with the 2019 ADEA Annual Session & Exhibition in Chicago.