

# Happy Feet

## Medical students' philanthropy gives youngsters "Shoes That Fit"

Written by Sue Tin

"Hey! That's the girl that gave me my shoes!" Medical student Amanda O'Brien, '09 recalls a young student's enthusiastic greeting at the Enos Elementary School playground last spring. O'Brien fitted him with a new pair to replace his worn-out sneakers through a student philanthropy program called "Shoes That Fit."

The program sprung from a mentoring program at Enos Elementary School, located just northwest of the School's main campus in Springfield. Nearly 90 percent of Enos' students come from economically disadvantaged homes.

Shoes That Fit is one of several projects partnering SIU School of Medicine students and staff volunteers with Enos Elementary School. Enos has been SIU's adopted school in Springfield Public School District 186's business partner program since 1985, and a volunteer employee committee organizes numerous activities. Volunteers mentor Enos students year-round. O'Brien, who leads this year's Shoes That Fit project, explains that about five years ago, **Sara Dyrstad, M.D., '07** mentored Enos students. "She saw kids come to school wearing flip flops in the winter; one girl had to share one pair of shoes with a sister. Many kids wore beat-up shoes that they had outgrown." Sara was involved in the program at Augustana College and encouraged the SIU committee to start it at Enos.

Each December, medical student class representatives and other medical student volunteers lead fundraising efforts to pur-

chase shoes. They set up a holiday tree in a campus location so that donors may write their name on a paper ornament for each contribution. Most of the gifts are from SIU faculty and staff, and some nurses at Memorial Medical Center also support the program. O'Brien enlisted the help of her father, anesthesiologist and SIU alumnus **Chris Fiedler, M.D., ('91)** who posts a Shoes That Fit flyer at his office.

Teachers at Enos identify children needing shoes, size their growing feet, and send the list to SIU. The local Walmart Supercenter provides a discount for the shoes and donates some of the socks ordered by the medical students.

On the day that the medical students fit the new shoes and socks on each child, there are plenty of smiles and laughter in the cafeteria as the kids jump, run and test their new shoes for performance. Before they return to class, each child signs a "thank-you" card for a donor.

These gifts make a big difference in the lives of these children. "The mission of Shoes That Fit is to improve the self-esteem of these kids so that they will do better in school. You can just see an immediate change in them, the pride on their faces. They just carry themselves a little taller. They are new people," says O'Brien. Medical students planning this year's Shoes That Fit fund-raiser are determined to put shoes on the feet of more than 90 children.

Shoes That Fit has been a part of each



From top: Enos Elementary students Kendell Stewart, Chase Vallies, Shaquana McBride, Desmen Ferrell, Alex Burnom and Daveante Smolley show off their shoes; Medical students Mark Adams and Melissa Schleeper lace up new shoes for Kendall Stewart and Drake Evans.

year of O'Brien's medical education in Springfield, and is an important part of her own philosophy of giving. "This matters. I think these kids will someday be 'givers.' I went to private schools that stressed community service as part of education. It's a way to connect with the community, to meet people who are different from me and to understand their needs. You can call it philanthropy, but it's who I am. I need that." ●●●

### Student benefits from endowment

Medical student Gina Dawe has received a monetary award from the Dr. Hildegard C. Landecker Memorial Endowment Fund at SIU School of Medicine. Dawe is the 26th recipient of the award, which is given annually to a freshman female medical student with high academic standing.

Dawe is the daughter of Robert and Patricia Dawe of Granville. She is a graduate of Putnam County High School in Granville (2004) and Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, where she earned her bachelor's degree in biology (2008).

The Landecker fund was established in 1982 by Manfred Landecker, Ph.D., emeritus professor of political science at SIU Carbondale, in memory of his mother, who was a pediatrician.

## Camp COCO gets children's stamp of approval

Children with cancer got a "Passport to Adventure" at this year's Camp COCO, a week-long camp held in July at Timber Pointe Outdoor Conference Center on Lake Bloomington. Camp COCO is a project of Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield.

The campers receive special attention from a number of SIU's pediatric staff members, who provide medical care and spend time with their patients and some of their patient's siblings. Health professionals who treat some of the campers at the St. Jude's affiliate OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria and Carle Clinic in Champaign, as well as community volunteers from Springfield provide care during the week.

"The campers get a second chance at the childhood they have lost during the camp's week of activities, giving them a time to just have fun. The hard work of volunteers and the contributors make this possible," said Dr. **Gregory P. Brandt**, SIU assistant professor of pediatrics and camp medical director. Brandt, director of SIU's pediatric hematology/oncology division, works with his team and St. John's Children's Hospital plus staff from the St. Jude's Affiliate and Carle to provide medical support to the camp.

"Passport to Adventure" was the theme for the 23rd annual camp, which hosted 120 campers from 58 different hometowns around central Illinois.

On the first day, each camper was issued a passport which was stamped when they went through "customs." Each was outfitted with t-shirts, sweatshirts, a backpack and camp journal and a pillowcase for autographs. Campers made cabin flags and decorated their cabins. During the week, campers "traveled" to places around the world: Spain, Italy, China, Japan, Africa, Australia, the Bahamas, and Mexico. Campers also found time for canoeing, swimming, hiking and horseback riding. They did target sports and arts and crafts,



Campers get silly during their group photo at Camp COCO.

wrote and published a newspaper, and played basketball and board games.

On Friday, the closing ceremony was interrupted by a "pirate" who invited the kids to join in some swashbuckling fun at next year's Camp COCO, "Pirate Cove, Who Stole the Black Pearl?"

You can help make next year's camp a success. The SIU pediatrics department has established the COCO Children's Cancer Fund, which supports the camp, as well as year-round projects for patients being treated for hematological and oncological diseases. More than 600 individuals, service clubs and businesses supported this year's camp.

Contributions to the COCO Children's Cancer Fund can be made payable to and mailed to the Camp COCO/SIU Foundation, P.O. Box 19666, Springfield, Ill. 62794-9666, 217-545-2955. ●●●

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