

# Alums active in Native American outreach

As students at our School of Dentistry, Drs. Jessica Bremerman ('10), Danielle Stimson ('11) and Rolanda Ward ('11) appreciated the part played by the Society of American Indian Dentists (SAID) in providing mentorship and support during their dental education journey.

This spring, the three alumnae were thrilled when they heard that SAID would hold its annual meetings at the Tulalip reservation near Seattle – and they seized the opportunity for meaningful participation.

Working with Dr. Beatrice Gandara of our Oral Medicine faculty, they organized a full-day dental career exploration event at the meetings. The Toothtastic Dental Camp on June 1 drew middle- and high-school students from the Tulalip, Skagit, Muckleshoot and other local tribes to talk with Native American dentists and dental students from all around the country.

“When events like Toothtastic are available and young students have the opportunity to meet Native professionals who have succeeded, that gives them hope to pursue their dreams and lets them know that it is possible to move from the reservation to get an education,” Dr. Stimson said. She is a member of the Blackfeet Nation, while Dr. Bremerman is Yakama and Dr. Ward is Aleut.

Drs. Bremerman and Stimson work in Indian Health Service (IHS) clinics on the reservations where they grew up, while Dr. Ward is an Oral Medicine resident at the UW.

As an undergraduate, Dr. Bremerman said, she felt isolated, but SAID

gave her friends to share in the experience of dental school. It also provided a connection to mentors such as SAID board member Dr. Nancy Reifel, who furnishes students with advice and networking opportunities. For Dr. Stimson, conversations with her SAID mentor helped her learn more about working for the IHS and building relationships in organized dentistry.

Dr. Ward said that SAID's support of students matters greatly “because

first American Indian dentist.

The alums drew on their experience as students, when they mentored attendees at several OEPD-organized “dental camps.” These camps, held several times a year, are designed to inspire students from backgrounds underrepresented in the dental profession to pursue oral health care careers, and include hands-on dental simulation activities such as waxing and impression-taking.

At the SAID meetings, Dr. Ward

was also a conference speaker, sharing her expertise in burning mouth syndrome and other oral neuropathies.

Ten UW dental students, including incoming Native American students Sarah McDonald (Haida), Justin Van Riper (Cowlitz) and Emily Yopez (Taos), assisted with teaching hands-on activities. Other highlights of the meetings included presentations by



From left: Drs. Rolanda Ward, Danielle Stimson and Jessica Bremerman have helped build bridges to the Native American community.

many people drop off along the way, and helping to keep a student on track can be quite crucial in the long run.” Dr. Ward received an early boost from her participation in the Summer Medical and Dental Education program, an enrichment program at the UW funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and jointly directed by the Schools of Medicine and Dentistry.

The three alumnae worked to organize Toothtastic with Dr. Gandara, who is also director of our School's Office of Educational Partnerships and Diversity (OEPD), and School of Dentistry staff members Annikka Frostad-Thomas and Lan Nguyen, who are members of the Americorps VISTA program. Highlights included guest speaker Dr. George Blue Spruce, the

UW faculty members Drs. Peter Milgrom, Rebecca Slayton and Johan Aps and Professor Emeritus Dr. Thomas Morton. At the banquet, Dean Joel Berg was honored for his contributions to Native American communities with a blanket ceremony, followed by a round dance (also known as a “friendship dance”) by all the attendees.

Dr. Gandara said she hopes to build upon June's success by continuing to do outreach events for young students in the local Native communities.

Dr. Bremerman summed it up: “The kids that attended Toothtastic were great. ... I hope they all realized that with a little hard work and determination, they can achieve anything – including a career in dentistry.”

— Annikka Frostad-Thomas