

---

---

Posted on Tue, Jun. 30, 2009

## Columbus dental assistant wins gold

BY LARRY GIERER

Ashley Mills says when she was a girl she loved going to the dentist.

"The dental assistants were all so pretty and friendly," Mills says. "They looked like they were having so much fun. I wanted to be one of them."

This week she will be. The 24-year-old Mills is beginning her professional career with Columbus dentist Dr. Ronald Kowan, with whom she has done an internship.

Mills will be doing so with a lot of confidence. Last week in Kansas City, Mo., she competed in the SkillsUSA Championships and finished first in the nation in the dental assisting competition.

"It was a really grueling, nerve-wracking experience," says Mills, who brought her gold medal to the office Monday. "I started to feel sick."

Mills was representing Columbus Tech, from which she just graduated.

Others from Columbus Tech also competed in different categories. In the health knowledge bowl competition, a team composed of Claudia Haines, Rebecca Bishop, Anthony Fitzpatrick and Regina Ridgley got silver, while Joseph B. Allen got bronze in automotive refinishing technology.

It wasn't just college students competing. Three Shaw High School students, Cody Getkin, Zack Elkins and Logan Bourne, won team bronze in crime scene investigation.

The SkillsUSA championship is the showcase for some of the best career and technical students in the nation with more than 5,000 competing. The competition was held in Bartle Hall Convention Center, while the awards were presented in Kemper Arena.

"People were competing in cabinet making, auto repair, just all kinds of stuff," Mills says. "Near where I was doing my work were students competing in baking. The aroma sure was good."

Following written exams on subjects such as anatomy and oral pathology, Mills was graded at 17 different checkpoints, doing everything from making dental impressions and X-ray placement to doing the Heimlich maneuver.

"We just moved from one station to another," she says. "It took about five hours."

She says an instructor at Columbus Tech, Sharron Cook, who is also a dental assistant, is the person responsible for getting her involved in SkillsUSA.

"My first quarter she told me she was going to start molding me for this competition," says a smiling Mills. After 18 months of training, she was ready.

"She is a very hard worker and very bright," Kowan says. "She came here as an intern and we fell in love with her. I didn't even know about this competition but it's no surprise she won."

"I just have a passion for this work," Mills says.

---

---

© 2009 Ledger-Enquirer and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.

<http://www.ledgerenquirer.com>