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## Bombeck Family's \$1 Million Gift to Help Fund Expansion of University of Dayton's Children's Center

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Aug. 14, 2000  
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**NEWS RELEASE**

**BOMBECK FAMILY'S \$1 MILLION GIFT  
 TO HELP FUND EXPANSION OF UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON'S CHILDREN'S CENTER**

DAYTON, Ohio — Her words, syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman wrote, “won her the permanent place of honor in American life: the refrigerator door.”

Her spirit will live in the classrooms, the courtyard, the sand boxes of the Bombeck Family Learning Center at the University of Dayton.

It's fitting that the University of Dayton's Children's Center, currently undergoing a \$3.8 million conversion into an early childhood education learning demonstration school, will be renamed the Bombeck Family Learning Center, according to UD officials. The expansion begins this month and will be completed in fall 2001.

The Bombeck name symbolizes family life. The late Erma Bombeck, UD's most famous graduate and America's best-loved humorist and chronicler of family life, drew much of her inspiration — and some of her best lines — from her children. Bill Bombeck, a 1950 alumnus, spent 26 years as an educator before taking on the Bombeck family's business affairs.

The Bombeck family's recent \$1 million gift to the University's \$150 million “Call to Lead” fund-raising and image-building campaign will go toward the child care center's transformation into a facility that planners hope looks and feels more like a home than a school. To date, the campaign has raised \$111 million.

“Our family is so pleased with the match up of our gift with the Children's Center,” said Bombeck, co-chair of the Call to Lead Campaign. “Erma's personal life and public comments about families and children make this a natural choice for us and the University. The Learning Center is one more addition to Erma's strong presence in this neighborhood. It sits between Erma Bombeck Way (Brown Street) and Woodland Cemetery (where she's buried), not far from Erma's House and South Park, where she once lived.”

Thomas Lasley, dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions, called the center “a wonderful tribute to the work of the Bombeck family and, in a very tangible way, a real reflection of what Erma Bombeck devoted her writing life to — children, parents and the

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interesting events that occur when little people and bigger people get in the same place and learn together.”

In a groundbreaking ceremony fit for the occasion in April, toddlers with hard hats and sand-box shovels turned over the first spades of dirt for an expansion that will nearly triple the size of the facility. All the classrooms, which will double in size, will be bright with lots of glass and natural light. A studio will be available for art projects, and a second gymnasium will be added. A second infant room will allow the center, which currently has a waiting list, to serve more children. The renovated center will have a science focus, featuring water tables and gardening areas, and be designed to support a curriculum inspired by educators Maria Montessori, Magda Gerber and Reggio Emilia, according to Nancy Sutton, director of the center.

The center, recently incorporated into UD’s School of Education and Allied Professions, will serve as a pre-service teaching site for UD’s early childhood education students and include a college classroom and observation pods in each room. About 60 students weekly currently visit the center to observe or interact with the children.

The renovation is one step toward gaining accreditation with the National Association for Education of Young Children — recognized in early childhood education circles as one benchmark in quality.

The center currently enrolls 86 children ranging in age from 6 weeks to 6 years from families at UD, NCR and the community. After the renovation, it will be able to accommodate 126 children.

Bill and Erma Bombeck co-chaired the University of Dayton’s National Alumni Challenge Campaign in the 1980s. Earlier this year, he donated her papers — manuscripts, columns and correspondence — to the University of Dayton’s archives, which will serve as a repository for her work. Today, he serves as the national chairman for disaster services for the American Red Cross — a volunteer role — and helps raise money for UD and other causes close to his heart. In 1995, he led the Diocese of Phoenix’s \$5.9 million drive for Catholic and non-Catholic charities. He has worked with the Arizona Kidney Foundation’s programs, and through the Bombeck family, organized the Erma Bombeck Organ Donor Awareness Project. He funneled proceeds from Erma’s last book, *Forever Erma*, back into her favorite charities.

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For media interviews, contact **Tom Lasley** at (937) 229-3557. To arrange an interview with **Bill Bombeck** or for a slide, contact Teri Rizvi at (937) 229-3241.