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NEWS RELEASE

ERMA WOULD'VE LOVED IT: UD'S CHILDREN CENTER TO BE RENAMED BOMBECK FAMILY LEARNING CENTER

DAYTON, Ohio — Erma Bombeck would've loved it. After all, in her heart — and newspaper columns — children were often found.

Those who knew and adored the University of Dayton's most famous alumna will be on hand to help dedicate the school's Bombeck Family Learning Center at 10 a.m. on Friday, March 8, at 941 Alberta St.

The Bombeck family donated \$1 million to transform UD's child-care center into an early childhood education demonstration school. With its \$3.8 million in renovations, the center is now a pre-service teaching site for UD's early childhood education students.

The dedication is part of UD's Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop on Saturday, March 9, which pays tribute to America's best-loved humorist and chronicler of family life. Aside from the workshop, a public address by Phil Donahue and launching of the Erma Bombeck virtual museum also are part of the event.

Bill Bombeck, who will be on hand for the dedication, said his late wife always had a special fondness for learning centers and teachers. He recalled Erma as a young mother when she volunteered to watch over recess on her children's elementary school playground.

"She would report on the little bodies zooming down the off-limits icy slide like errant missiles ... or how she would act as arbitrator of endless games of 'keep-away,'" he remembers. "Erma had such an admiration for the teachers of tiny kids. How could they stay so cool and calm with 15 kids when she was a basket case with three!"

The 20,940 square-foot center, recently incorporated into UD's School of Education and Allied Professions, has a science focus, featuring gardening and growing areas, a lot of natural light and a petting zoo of snakes, frogs, lizards and more. It also has a college classroom and observation booths in each room.

In 2000, after deciding to give \$1 million to UD's Call to Lead campaign, the Bombeck family was asked by UD officials if they would like the gift to be used for the center's expansion, Bombeck explains.

"We visited the center and met the staff," Bombeck says. "We understood that as

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important as the building, the plans and the equipment might be, the true measure of the quality of the program would rest with the staff, the teachers in training and the children. We were very impressed. I contacted my three kids and Erma's mother. They all agreed it would be a great memorial for Erma and our entire family. We are proud to be part of the learning center.

"Erma's personal life and public comments about families and children made this a natural choice for us and the University," says Bombeck, co-chair of UD's \$150 million Call to Lead Campaign, which ends in June and is expected to reach its goal. "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 interesting events that occur when little people and bigger people get in the same place and learn together."

UD officials say the renovated center is one step closer to accreditation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children, recognized in early childhood education as a major benchmark in quality. About 70 early childhood education students visit the center each week to observe or interact with children. It enrolls 114 children ranging in age from 6 weeks to 6 years from families at UD, NCR and the community.

Shauna Adams, an associate professor of teacher education at UD, was part of a team that investigated some of the top institutions in the country for the project. She says the facility combines the best of current practices while leaving room for future changes in the educational arena.

"We have just begun to tap into the potential of how the University as a whole can augment the program at the center and in turn help us reach out to the regional, state and national early childhood community," she says.

The center is also reaching out to other academic departments on campus, says Nancy Sutton, the center's director. School of Education students "take some of their required music, science and art classes at the center, where they can combine their book knowledge with hands-on instruction with our children."

Also, undergraduate music students have begun teaching piano to pre-school and kindergarten youth at the center. Connections with other University departments also are planned, Sutton says.

"I don't know how to describe the difference in this place since it was renovated," Sutton says. "Children require a certain amount of physical space and private space for emotional and social growth, and now they have it. The center is very pleasing to their little

minds. We have furniture and a living room so they feel like they're in a safe, home environment, and we have pets and plants to nurture their minds and hearts."

For three decades, Erma Bombeck celebrated the extraordinary in the ordinary and chronicled life's absurdities in a syndicated column carried by 700 newspapers prior to her death of kidney disease in 1996. She credited the University of Dayton with preparing her for life and work. She graduated in 1949 with a degree in English and never forgot the encouragement she received as a writer at the University of Dayton.

In spring 2000, Bill announced he would donate Erma's papers — manuscripts, columns and correspondence — to the University of Dayton's archives, which will serve as a repository for her work.

Of the many Erma columns he's cherished, Bill Bombeck has a particular favorite, a May 15, 1977, piece that compared children to kites: "You spend a lifetime trying to get them off the ground. ... You watch them lifted by the wind and assure them that someday they'll fly. ... With each twist of the ball and twine there is a sadness that goes with the joy, because the kite becomes more distant, and somehow you know it won't be long before that beautiful creature will snap the lifeline that bound you together and soar as it was meant to soar — free and alone.

"Only then do you know that you did your job."

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