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DAYTON

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## NEWS RELEASE

### ERMA BOMBECK CONFERENCE ON POPULAR AMERICAN HUMOR SCHEDULED AT UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON NEXT SPRING

DAYTON, Ohio — A four-day conference on popular American humor at the University of Dayton next spring will pay tribute to the life and work of Erma Bombeck, the University's most famous graduate and America's best-loved humorist and chronicler of family life.

The conference, which will include the official awarding of the Erma Bombeck papers to the University of Dayton, will be held March 29-April 1, 2000. As part of UD's sesquicentennial celebration, the Erma Bombeck Conference on Popular American Humor will feature a writers' workshop, a symposium for scholars and a creative writing competition. Nationally recognized humorists — led by keynote speaker Art Buchwald, author Liz Carpenter and cartoonist Bil Keane, all close friends of Erma's — will take part in the workshop. In addition, Bombeck's New York literary agent, Aaron Priest, and son, Matt, a television feature film writer, will offer sessions at the writers' workshop.

Here are the conference's major components:

- The fourth annual "Erma Bombeck Writing Competition" is open to residents of Montgomery, Greene, Miami, Warren and Clark counties and all UD alumni. They are eligible to enter their previously unpublished personal essays of 450 words or less by January 15. Winners will be announced March 29. The writing competition is co-sponsored by the Washington-Centerville Public Library, Amos Suburban Newspapers, ActiveDayton.com, *Dayton Daily News*, and UD.
- Art Buchwald, the Pulitzer Prize-winning, syndicated columnist, will deliver the conference's keynote address, "Things I Cannot Tell You," at 8 p.m. on Thursday, March 30. The program will be free and open to the public.
- The writers' workshop features a distinguished list of more than 20 speakers, among them prominent columnists, writers, cartoonists and editorial cartoonists. Six tracks of concurrent workshops are scheduled for the morning and afternoon of Friday, March 31. Bill Bombeck will donate Bombeck's papers to UD during a luncheon program that day.
- An academic symposium, featuring local and national scholars and geared to college and university students and professors, will be conducted April 1. Plans call for a series of presentations in the morning followed by concurrent, two-hour workshops

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on humor and healing and humor in the classroom in the afternoon. Following lunch, a proposed panel of six members — four professors and two humorists from the Writers' Workshop — will discuss the work of Erma Bombeck in the context of popular American humor.

Bombeck credited the University of Dayton with preparing her for life and work, for making her believe she could write. She graduated in 1949 with a degree in English and never forgot that she got her start as a writer at the University of Dayton.

In a 1991 interview with the *University of Dayton Quarterly*, Erma spoke of the encouragement Marianist Brother Tom Price gave her. Price served as the faculty adviser to *The Exponent*, the college literary magazine.

"He said to me, 'Why don't you contribute some humor to this?' That was like a breath of fresh air," she recalled. "No one wanted to write humor at that time. ... It was tricky for one thing. To make fun of someone or something takes a pretty thick skin.

"I started to write humor for *The Exponent*, and one day he said to me three magic words: 'You can write.' It's all I needed as an impetus to keep going, and it sustained me for a long time. Here's a man who reads *Jane Eyre*, who knows all these things. This man knows what he's talking about. I believed him. You need someone whom you respect to tell you something like that."

Bombeck gave back to the University of Dayton in numerous ways. She served on the board of trustees from 1984 to 1987; co-chaired with her husband the National Alumni Challenge Campaign during the University's capital campaign in the 1980s; spoke at events on campus, including a writers' workshop; and participated in advertising and direct-mail campaigns to help broaden the University's image and recruit students. In 1981, she received an honorary doctorate from UD, and she was named an honorary trustee in 1988.

The project is co-sponsored by the board of directors of UD's National Alumni Association; the public relations committee of the National Alumni Association; University Libraries; department of English; department of communication; alumni relations office; public relations office; *Dayton Daily News*; Amos Suburban Newspapers; Washington-Centerville Public Library; Books & Co.; ActiveDayton.com; WYSO-FM; and WHIO-TV.

For more information about the conference, check the Web site:  
[www.activedayton.com/entertainment/erma](http://www.activedayton.com/entertainment/erma).