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NEWS RELEASE

(Editor's Note: The presenters, including Art Buchwald, are available for advance interviews. Call Teri Rizvi at (937) 229-3241 to make arrangements.)

CELEBRATED WRITERS AND CARTOONISTS TO HEADLINE SPRING WRITERS' WORKSHOP HONORING ERMA BOMBECK

DAYTON, Ohio — The University of Dayton has attracted more than two dozen columnists, writers, cartoonists, editorial cartoonists, an agent and a syndicate representative for a spring writers' workshop to pay tribute to the life and work of Erma Bombeck.

Part of UD's sesquicentennial celebration, the writers' workshop is one feature of the four-day Erma Bombeck Conference on Popular American Humor to be held at the University of Dayton March 29-April 1, 2000. The Friday, March 31, writers' workshop is expected to draw writers, students and others interested in humor and human-interest writing. At the workshop's lunch, the Bombeck family will present Erma's papers to the University of Dayton.

Buchwald, author Liz Carpenter and cartoonist Bil Keane ("Family Circus") — 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. The sessions will play off titles from some of Bombeck's most popular books, such as "The Grass is Always Greener: How to Become Syndicated;" "At Wit's End: Writing the Human Interest Column;" "What Am I Doing in the Pits: Finding Humor in Everyday Life;" and "The Second Oldest Profession: So You Want to be-a Cartoonist."

The list of presenters also includes:

- Columnists Susan Ager of the *Detroit Free Press*; Lori Borgman of Knight Ridder Tribune Service; Mary McCarty and D.L. Stewart of the *Dayton Daily News*; Leonard Pitts Jr. of the *Miami Herald*; Laura Pulfer of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*; Sarah Rickman of the *Centerville-Bellbrook Times*; P. S. Wall of the Ballantine Publishing Group; Joe Weasel of Scripps Howard News Service; and Craig Wilson of *USA Today*;
- Cartoonists Robb Armstrong ("Jump Start"); Tom Batiuk ("Funky Winkerbean" and "Crankshaft"); and Tony Cochran ("Agnes");

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- Editorial cartoonists Chip Bok of the *Akron Beacon Journal*; Frank Cammuso of the *Herald-Journal and Post-Standard* in Syracuse, N.Y.; David Catrow of the *Springfield News-Sun*; and Jeff Darcy of the *Plain Dealer* in Cleveland;
- Author Michael J. Rosen, literary director of the Thurber House; free-lance writer Bonnie Abbott of Columbus, Ohio; Melvin Helitzer, journalism professor at Ohio University and author of five books, including *Comedy Writing Secrets* from Writers' Digest Books; Lee Salem, executive vice president and editor of Universal Press Syndicate; and Sandra Gurvis, author of six books and hundreds of magazine articles.

In a free, post-workshop session, Rosen and two other writers will read excerpts from and talk about the newly published *Mirth of a Nation: The Thurber Book of Contemporary Humor*. The 425-page paperback book — the first in a series of biennial treasuries of American humor — *Mirth of a Nation* includes articles by more than 50 celebrated contemporary authors. The talk, slated from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., takes place in Kennedy Union on campus.

Following the workshop, a group of Erma's close friends and family will informally reminisce about her wit, wisdom, compassion and concern in "An Evening with Erma's Friends," at 8 p.m. in the Boll Theatre in Kennedy Union. It's free and open to the public. Moderated by WHIO-TV anchor Donna Jordan, the program will include video and audio clips and stories by literary agent Priest, syndicate representatives Salem and John McMeel (chairman and president of Andrews McMeel Universal), Carpenter (former press secretary for Lady Bird Johnson) cartoonist Keane, columnist Stewart, and Bill and Matt Bombeck.

The conference kicks off with a 6 p.m. Erma Bombeck writing competition awards ceremony on Wednesday, March 29, at the Washington-Centerville Public Library, 111 W. Spring Valley Rd. Bill Bombeck, her widower, will present the awards. Syndicated columnist Art Buchwald will deliver the keynote address, "Things I Cannot Tell You," at 8 p.m. on Thursday, March 30, at the Thomas J. Frericks Athletic and Convocation Center. Both events are free and open to the public. An academic symposium on April 1 will include a panel of scholars placing Bombeck's work in historical perspective.

Besides attending the workshop, people can interact with the writers and cartoonists in a number of ways. Online chats will be conducted by Cox Interactive Media on the conference's Web site, www.ActiveDayton.com/entertainment/erma/ in mid-March. Books & Co. will hold book signings, and several of the presenters will speak to UD classes during their visit. Art Buchwald will take part in a 5:30 p.m. \$50/plate dinner on Thursday, March 30, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom to launch UD's new Library Advancement Association. Guests will receive an autographed copy of Buchwald's book, *I'll Always Have Paris*. For dinner reservations, call Anita Brothers at (937) 229-2902.

For three decades, 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 graduated in 1949 with a degree in English and never forgot that she received encouragement as a writer at the University of Dayton.

The cost to attend both the March 31 writers' workshop and the April 1 academic symposium is \$100, or \$75 separately. Registration deadline is March 22. For brochures, e-mail erma@udayton.edu or call 1-888-UDALUMS or (937) 229-3241. Register online at www.ActiveDayton.com/entertainment/erma/.

The Erma Bombeck Conference on Popular American Humor is sponsored by the University of Dayton's National Alumni Association in conjunction with ActiveDayton.com, Books & Co., *Dayton Daily News*, News-Talk 1290 WHIO, Suburban Newspapers of Dayton, Washington-Centerville Public Library, WHIO-TV and WYSO-Radio.