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State Farm Gift Helps EIU Replace Outdated Driving-Simulation System

Jan-20-2006

Future driver education teachers are getting state-of-the-art training at Eastern Illinois University, thanks in large part to a gift from State Farm Insurance.

The \$5,000 contribution was combined with university funds to purchase a driving-simulation system that allows participants to sit behind a steering wheel, accelerator and brake pedal to react to real-life traffic situations presented on a video screen.

“This allows students to practice things we wouldn’t be able to do otherwise,” said Robert Bates, chair of the EIU Department of Health Studies. “It’s an opportunity to do it in a controlled environment.”

The experience will better prepare future teachers for training young people on proper driving techniques.

Stan McMorris, a State Farm agent in Charleston, helped secure the funds for EIU.

McMorris said that helping driver education programs has been his “pet project” for 36 years. He regularly talks to classes at area high schools and at EIU to promote traffic safety.

“It’s very dear to my heart to do things that are going to educate our young people to be better drivers,” McMorris said. “Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death of our young people, and State Farm is proud to do things like this which will contribute to their education and help prevent these deaths.”

Illinois and 23 other states require that all public schools provide driver education. Teachers who use driving simulation in their classrooms are required to have at least one semester hour of preparation with the equipment.

Some EIU officials, including President Lou Hencken, got a first-hand look at the eight-seat simulation system on Friday.

“We certainly appreciate the generosity of State Farm in making this possible,” Hencken said. “This will allow us to teach our students who are eventually going to teach driver education in high schools, and the end result will be that our teachers and their students will be better-prepared.”

The simulator uses a video-disc system, a major step up from the department’s previous equipment, which utilized 16-mm film projectors and VHS tapes.

“It moved us up 20-plus years in terms of the age of our equipment,” Bates said.

In fact, it was the age of the old system that spurred department secretary Jeanette Wilson to find a way to purchase a newer model.

McMorris and State Farm quickly came to mind when Wilson was trying to think of community members who would be willing to help.

“He was very enthusiastic about it,” Wilson said of McMorris. “He understood that this would impact a great number of high schools in Illinois and other states. He is very much appreciated.”



Several EIU officials joined State Farm Insurance agent Stan McMorris to get a first-hand look at the university’s new driving simulation system, funded in part by a \$5,000 State Farm donation. Pictured with the system from left are Rob Bates, chair of the Department of Health Studies; Blair Lord, provost and vice president for academic affairs; Jeanette Wilson, office systems specialist in the Department of Health Studies; McMorris; Charles Rohn, dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies; Lou Hencken, president; and Richard Cavanaugh, school health adviser in the Department of Health Studies.