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NEWS

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For Immediate Release:

EIU TO PRESENT HONORARY DEGREES TO BURNHAM NEAL, DARIO COVI

CHARLESTON – As part of Eastern Illinois University's Spring 2003 commencement ceremonies, the institution plans to honor two individuals with honorary degrees.

Burnham E. Neal of Mattoon will be honored for his long-time service and support to the university and surrounding communities, while Dario A. Covi, a 1943 alumnus from Louisville, Ky., will be recognized for his life-long scholarship and commitment to higher education.

Commencement ceremonies are scheduled to take place Saturday, May 10, in Eastern's Lantz Arena.

BURNHAM NEAL

Burham Neal gives. And gives. And gives.

Eastern Illinois University hopes to return the favor by giving him something – an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service.

Those who know Neal best call him a quiet, unassuming man. Alice Shawver had the privilege of being president of the EIU Foundation Board while Neal served on the board. She calls him an "exceptional person" and "a gentleman in every respect."

"The Neal family is a wonderful role model in terms of concern for other people. (Burnham) has freely given of his time, his expertise and his financial support over the years," Shawver said. "I certainly feel he is very worthy of this honor."

Neal, who was raised in Cumberland County, purchased the 20-year-old Neal Oil Company from his father in 1945. The business has since grown into a chain of 31 retail stores, now known as Neal Tire & Auto Service, and eight warehouses supplying tire and auto service equipment throughout the Midwest.

The Mattoon resident discovered that as his business expanded, so did his family's circle of friends, patrons and employees – many of whom wished to attend Eastern and/or various community colleges around the area. Circumstances allowed Neal, who is an avid supporter of education, to establish scholarships which directly help deserving students reach their goals.

He chose not to stop there, however, as he also wanted to tighten bonds between the community and the university.

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NEAL, COVI

Toward that goal, Neal, along with his wife, Nancy, and his late sister, Rosemary Neal of Toledo, began envisioning a university welcome center. That vision included a highly visible point of access to the Eastern Illinois University community for both prospective students and donors. Three gifts totaling \$2 million funded the purchase of land and the construction of a 7,000-plus square-foot, two-story facility, now located at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Douglas Drive in Charleston.

The building, which opened in 2002, also serves as the new home to the EIU Foundation and the university's Office of Development.

While some may find Neal's interest in EIU surprising – he's never attended the university – others find it par for the course.

"He's been kind to a lot of schools and organizations," said Cindy Neal, Neal's daughter-in-law. "He likes to do good for those organizations right in his own backyard."

At age 80, Neal shows no sign of slowing down in his philanthropic and good-will efforts. He continues to give to the communities that have supported him and his family over the years. In addition to higher education, Neal has supported various other causes and individuals in the area, including humane associations and cancer research.

DARIO COVI

As a recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, Dario Covi will finally get his time on Eastern's commencement stage.

A 1943 graduate of EIU, Covi was called into active military service before then-President Robert Guy Buzzard could hand him his diploma. The disappointment didn't steer Covi away from higher education, though; upon his return to the states, he went on to get both a master of arts degree in art history from the University of Iowa and his doctorate in art history from New York University.

Most of his years since have been spent as a professor and professor emeritus of art history and curator of the University Art Collection at the Allen R. Hite Art Institute of the University of Louisville. He is considered a distinguished art historian whose work is recognized regionally, nationally and internationally.

While academicians may call this year's honoree Dr. Covi, Robert Augustine, dean of Eastern's Graduate School, simply calls him "Uncle Bud." And he marvels at the irony which brought him to the university the same year his uncle received a Distinguished Alumnus Award – 1979.

"I remember it well because it was my first year as a faculty member here," Augustine said.

As dean, Augustine will be on the stage as his uncle receives his honorary degree on Saturday. Other family members plan to be on hand, as well, cheering from the audience. "We're a real tight Italian family," Augustine added.

Among those will be Frieda Augustine – Covi's youngest sister and the dean's mother – who helped her brother get through his years at Eastern by providing a much needed service.

Robert Augustine said Covi would send his dirty laundry home (Livingston, Ill., located near St. Louis) via train. His little sister – a high school student at the time – would pick it up, wash and dry it, pack it up and send it back to Charleston. She nearly always included a batch of fudge, as well, Augustine said.

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NEAL, COVI

A second sister, Lucy McGartland of Crestwood, Mo.; her daughter, Jackie Horn of St. Louis; and Covi's wife, Madeline, also plan to be in attendance on Saturday, Augustine said.

In 2000, Covi and his wife established the Joseph and Cecilia Covi Scholarship in honor of Covi's parents who, Augustine said, were "quite a pair."

Joseph Covi, who hailed from Italy, served in the military there, but arrived home to find little opportunity for a job. He came to the United States, immediately settling in the small southern Illinois town that became his home. He made his career by working in the coal mines.

Although born in the states, Cecilia Covi moved to Italy with her Italian-born parents while still very young. She returned to the U.S. when Joseph Covi, who was of marrying age, wrote to his family to tell them of his search for an Italian bride. Although the young couple had known each other prior to Joseph Covi's departure to the U.S., there had been no hint of romance. Nevertheless, the soon-to-be Cecilia Covi traveled solo to New York, Chicago, then down to the St. Louis where she married Joseph Covi and began house-keeping.

The couple had four children; Dario was the eldest. A third sister, Erma Reis, is deceased.