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## **2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year to Speak at EIU**

*Sep-01-2009*

Linda Smerge, the 2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year, will present "My Story -- From the Heart" at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 8, in Buzzard Auditorium on the campus of Eastern Illinois University.

Her appearance commemorates Eastern's College of Education and Professional Studies' Fall 2009 kick-off event, and is being sponsored by CEPS student professional organizations. Admission is free, and the public is invited to attend.

As the 2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year, Smerge, a first-grade teacher at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Cicero School District 99, has the opportunity to speak at teacher workshops, educational conferences, and civic and community meetings across the state.

Smerge left a successful law practice after 13 years with an overwhelming desire to make a real difference in children's lives. This goal remained her focus as she faced the challenges of transitioning from the courtroom to the classroom.

Although the road to the classroom was a bumpy transition, she never lost her focus.

In August 2001, Smerge joined Cicero School District 99 and was presented with the challenge of a first- and second-grade special education cross-categorical class at Wilson School. Her students had a wide array of disabilities, and her class materials had not yet arrived.

Smerge accepted this daunting task, making something out of nothing. Her energy and determination shifted into high gear as she maintained her students' interest by ensuring they were engaged and continuously on-task by changing activities continuously.

She has high expectations of her students and herself, and does not accept failure. Her relationships with her students and their parents form a foundation for teaching and learning that instills a solid academic focus in their lives.

Smerge holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in early childhood education, and a law degree from Northern Illinois University.