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University Marketing and Communications

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## International EIU Alumni to be Recognized as Global Ambassadors

Sep-17-2009

For more than 50 years, Eastern Illinois University has hosted international students on its campus. Eight of these individuals will be recognized and honored this weekend as Global Ambassadors for 2009.

"We will honor these alumni who exemplify Eastern Illinois University's definition of global citizen," said Sue Songer, director of the Office of International Programs. "We once applauded them, as students, for their courage in leaving home to live and study in a new land and culture. They now share a common history and enjoy excellent reputations in their careers and lives.

"We are proud and honored to name them EIU Global Ambassadors."

As part of the 2009 International Alumni Reunion, this year's honorees will have the opportunity to tour campus and departments, meet with EIU President Bill Perry and participate in a formal dinner/awards ceremony on Saturday.

A welcome reception, scheduled for 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 18, in the University Ballroom, MLK Jr. Union, is free and open to community residents.

Eastern's 2009 Global Ambassadors are as follows:

**Dr. Vicente DiBella Jr.** ('81, Brazil) planned to study medicine in his native Brazil until one of his teachers there, Schellas Hyndman, was hired as the head coach of EIU's soccer team. Hyndman invited DiBella to join him at EIU, offering him a Talented Student athletic scholarship. DiBella accepted and began his studies in zoology at Eastern in 1979. He and his teammates went to the NCAA Nationals during the university's first year as Division I in 1980 and, for many weeks, the team was ranked best in the nation on the national poll.

Upon graduation, DiBella returned to Brazil and medical school, completing his residency in obstetrics and gynecology, with specialization in ultrasonography and colposcopy.

**Peter Gitau** ('95, Kenya) currently serves as the associate vice chancellor for student affairs and dean of students at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. In addition, he is the founder and executive director of TMKC (Teach My Kenyan Children), an international non-profit organization whose goal is to foster development through education in Africa. TMKC has transformed rural villages in Kenya by providing learning materials to school children, conducting medical clinics, training teachers and other professionals, administering school feeding programs, constructing school community libraries, and implementing an aggressive scholarship program for students in rural Kenya.

Gitau, who earned his master's degree in educational administration from Eastern, lives in Murphysboro with his wife, Trizah, and their three children.

**Karl H. Hecker** ('86, Germany) joined the chemistry program at Eastern in Fall 1985 as a graduate student. After receiving additional extensive training in academia, at institutions in both the U.S. and abroad, he transitioned into industry in 1998. Since then, he has led the development of more than 100 commercially successful products. In his most recent position at Quidel Corp., he led a team of scientists developing rapid diagnostic tests for infectious diseases for point-of-care and over-the-counter use. Hecker holds several U.S. patents and is the co-inventor on several published patent applications.

He and his wife, Wanping Mai ('87), live in San Diego, Calif.

**Tian Li** ('98, China) arrived in the U.S. in 1997, enrolling in EIU's graduate program in political science. Immediately following graduation, he secured a position as an international broadcaster with Radio Free Asia, a non-profit news organization sponsored by the U.S. Congress. The mission of Radio Free Asia is to provide accurate and timely news and information to Asian countries where access to free press is prohibited. Li has written and produced hundreds of reports and feature programs and says that his work "is very rewarding because I have received much positive feedback from my audience in China."

He resides in Rockville, Md.

**Paramjit Sidhu** ('91, India) worked as a bank manager and earned his master's degree in commerce and a law degree in his native India before coming to the U.S. in 1989. He enrolled as a graduate student in the business administration program at Eastern in 1991, and remained in the country upon graduating. He secured positions as manager, director and vice president of finance in the homecare and nursing home industry. Since 2001, he has worked as an administrator for Joliet Oncology-Hematology Associates, Ltd., and manages a multi-modality, free-standing diagnostic center. Additionally, he serves as CEO of a project in India where a JOHA promoter established a cyclotron facility to produce radiopharmaceuticals.

He and his wife, Washinder, reside in Naperville.

**Brenda Gonzales Tanner** ('80, Philippines) arrived in the U.S. in 1979 after receiving a Foreign Student Scholarship from Eastern to pursue her

**Brenda Gonzales Tanner** ('80, Philippines) arrived in the U.S. in 1979 after receiving a Foreign Student Scholarship from Eastern to pursue her master's degree in business administration. After graduating, she worked at the ATS Corporation, providing information technology services to several government agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp., and the Department of Defense, where she is currently assigned. After nearly 30 years of service, she now works as a project management and business/systems analysis principal. Awarded the National Partnership for Reinventing Government's Hammer Award in 1998 by Vice President Al Gore, she has also received several commendation letters from HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo on her contributions to the Community Builder program.

Tanner and her husband, Donald, reside in Vienna, Va. A founding member of the International Alumni Advisory Board at EIU, she continues today to serve on that board.

**Ray Wallace** ('81, '82, Northern Ireland), provost and senior vice chancellor at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith, earned his bachelor's degree in physical education in 1981 and a master's in English in 1982 from Eastern. The Antrim, Northern Ireland, native arrived at EIU in 1978 on both a track scholarship and an international student academic scholarship. He represented his country from 1977 to 1981 in international track events all over Europe, represented EIU in track from 1978 to 1981, and became a U.S. citizen in 1989. His career has allowed him to serve universities and colleges throughout the country and to travel the world, promoting the importance of international outreach for both students and faculty alike.

**Wen-Jyh Daniel Wang** ('89, Taiwan) attended a teachers college in Taiwan and, upon graduation, began teaching mechanical technology to adult students. He came to the U.S. at the age of 35, planning to pursue his master's degree in technology at EIU. Following his graduation in 1989, he went on to study at Purdue University and Pennsylvania State. He returned to Taiwan and accepted a position teaching at Chen-Shiu University (which was a junior college at the time) in 1993. Two years later, he was named chair of that university's Department of Industrial Engineering and Management.

Wang and his wife, Vicky, have a son -- Shou-Jen "Steve" -- who is carrying on the family tradition. He is currently a graduate student in EIU's technology program.