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March 14, 1997

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

BUSINESSWOMAN REFLECTS ON FIRST YEAR AS EIU TRUSTEE

CHARLESTON -- Betsy Mitchell knows the public universities in the state will have to work hard this spring to attract the attention of Illinois lawmakers already focused on the hot issue of adequately funding elementary and secondary schools.

Mitchell, public affairs director for Devonshire Realty of Champaign, is also an associate with the Springfield lobbying firm Cook-Witter, Inc. She understands that numerous issues are competing for legislators' time and focus during the spring session.

Mitchell is beginning her second year as a trustee for Eastern Illinois University, one of seven new board members appointed to Eastern's board by Gov. Jim Edgar following the reorganization of the Illinois public higher education in 1995. She and her fellow trustees completed their first year at the helm last Jan. 1 and Mitchell said they are ready to advocate again for Eastern, after a "building" year in 1996.

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"It has been a year of learning and rewards for me as a trustee at EIU," said Mitchell. "I have learned the inner workings of the university and have been rewarded through the effective working relationships between students, faculty, staff and the Board. The key to the success of those relationships for Eastern will be for all of us to continue to learn and listen."

Shortly after her swearing in a year ago, Mitchell said the adequate funding of Eastern would be one of her top priorities. It still is and Mitchell is delighted that Eastern was recommended for the highest percentage budget increase of all the public universities for next year. As part of that proposed budget, Eastern would receive approximately \$350,000 for deferred maintenance, another priority of Mitchell's.

Mitchell points to Eastern's continued strong academic reputation and record enrollments as evidence of a smooth transition to a new board. Among board accomplishments this past year, she cites the signing of a three-year contract with Eastern's faculty union that provides pay increases designed to bring EIU salaries in line with those at peer institutions.

Under the new board, Eastern also raised admission standards and supported the passage of legislation that allows universities to retain their tuition revenues in local accounts. The board approved a \$3.8 million energy conservation overhaul that will save at least \$380,000 per year in utility costs, approved purchasing a new telecommunications system that lowered student

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long-distance charges and upgraded outdated equipment and supported exploration of a campus-based child care center.

Mitchell said one of the board's most satisfying efforts was working with Eastern students to finance 11 campus improvement projects, including a food court, Internet access in dorms and 24-hour computer labs. Students voted to repay any debt taken on by the board for the projects through student fee increases.

Mitchell is an Eastern alum, having earned bachelor's and master's degrees in 1975 and 1980, respectively. She also earned a Master of Public Administration from the University of Illinois. She is married and has two children.