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Ceremonial Energy Center Groundbreaking Set for Friday

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Proposed EIU Renewable Energy Center

Although some ground has already been turned since the official beginning of the project on Nov. 9, a ceremonial groundbreaking is planned to commemorate the birth of Eastern Illinois University's Renewable Energy Center.

All those interested are welcome to join members of the university community and their guests at 3:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 20.

Due to very limited parking at the construction site, located on the east side of campus near the intersection of 18th Street (Illinois 130) and Edgar Drive, mass transportation will be provided. Buses will leave from the east side of EIU's MLK Jr. Union at 3:20 p.m. and return guests to a reception in the 1895 Room of the union immediately following the ceremony.

Those expected to speak at the ceremony include state Sen. Dale Righter; state Rep. Chapin Rose; Bill O'Rourke, chair, EIU Board of Trustees; Eric Wilbur, student representative, EIU

Board of Trustees; and EIU President Bill Perry.

Honeywell International Inc. representatives will also be in attendance, as that company will oversee the construction of the center, as well as the installation of agreed-upon energy conservation measures at EIU. In total, the project will cost \$80 million.

Honeywell guarantees that Eastern will attain annual energy/operation cost savings equal to or greater than the annual cost of financing the project. Annual energy savings of less than the guaranteed amount would be supplemented by Honeywell, and that supplement would be used to repay amounts financed.

The largest of the energy conservation measures -- with a price tag of \$56 million -- is the renewable energy center which Eastern's considers an economical and ecologically friendly answer to the university's critical power needs and made necessary by the deterioration of the university's current coal-fired power plant. Built circa 1925, the plant has been plagued by persistent equipment failures and replacement parts have been difficult, if not impossible, to find due to the age of the equipment.

The new facility -- a "biomass gasifier" -- will supply the university's heating and cooling needs by burning plant matter. Eastern will be permitted to burn two-inch virgin, or non-treated, wood chips obtained as by-products from the lumber industry. The wood chips will be much more "clean burning" than the coal used currently, thus reducing the overall air emissions being released into the environment.

Additional "biomass" fuel sources may be considered in the future.