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March 25, 1995

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

EIU STUDENTS HELP COMMUNITIES MARKET SPORTS

CHARLESTON -- Charleston and Mattoon have joined the race to attract lucrative sports tournaments to the area, and a group of Eastern Illinois University students is helping the two cities finish first.

As a class project, graduate students in Joan Schmidt's sports promotion class are completing an inventory of all sport-related facilities and spaces in Coles County so tourism officials can be more successful in attracting sporting events to the area.

"Each student has been assigned a Coles County facility to assess as well as resource people. We are studying state parks, community recreation facilities, lakes and university facilities, to name a few. We are not just looking at sports like baseball, basketball, soccer and tennis, but also orienteering, darts, water sports, ballooning and other amateur sports," said Schmidt, assistant professor of physical education at Eastern.

"I look at this as a very meaningful project for my class. It will give them hands-on experience in how to market sports to a community. I'm delighted to be

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asked to do this for Coles County," she added.

Phoebe Church, chair of the physical education department at Eastern, said, "This an excellent opportunity for our students to get practical experience with a state project. The sports promotion graduate class is the perfect class to do it."

Schmidt encourages individuals who are involved in sports governing bodies or know of someone who is to contact her at 581-5390 or 345-3235.

"Amateur sports is a \$30 billion dollar industry, and cities that host just five events annually can generate up to \$30 million in revenue. Sports also bring thousands of tourists into the area," Schmidt said.

She said the Illinois Bureau of Tourism has recognized the economic impact that amateur sports can have on the state and has retained the Chicago-based Edelman public relations firm to publicize selected state sporting events this year.

Schmidt noted that Edelman and the tourism bureau are considering forming an Illinois Sports Commission which would assist Illinois cities in bidding for regional or national sporting events.

Locally, Charleston has prospered from the Illinois High School Association boys and girls state track meets held at Eastern in May and from the Bambino baseball tournaments, as well as regional horseshoe tournaments, horse racing at the county fair, auto racing and other sporting events.

Mattoon also has benefitted financially from a five-state regional archery tournament and baseball and fishing tournaments which attract a large number of

participants. A new trail for bike and horseback riding and cross-country skiing also is in the works.

Charleston Tourism Committee member Janet Messenger said a sports inventory of facilities is overdue. "It is something that we have needed for a long time. When a group wants to hold a tournament in Charleston or the surrounding area, it becomes vitally important to know what facilities are available," she said.

Although the Charleston recreation department identifies facilities for prospective tournament organizers, Messenger said the city can be more aggressive in attracting tournaments that bring tourism dollars to the area if a thorough inventory of facilities is available.

Mattoon Tourism Committee member JoAnn Homann agrees with Messenger, suggesting that Coles County can improve its sports marketing efforts.

"We will be in a much better position to negotiate for larger sporting events if we know what we have to offer. A sports inventory will help us determine whether we need additional facilities and will better prepare us for the future," Homann said.