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NEWS

Contact: Shelly Flock (csslf@eiu.edu)
Vicki Woodard (csvns@eiu.edu)
217-581-7650
217-581-8444 (fax)

Office of Media Relations
600 Lincoln Avenue
Charleston, IL 61920-3099
(www.eiu.edu/~pubaff/omr.htm)

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For Immediate Release:

SAILORS LOOKS IN NEW DIRECTIONS AS DIRECTOR/GENERAL MANAGER OF WEIU

CHARLESTON – Richard “Rick” Sailors loved teaching. He realized, however, when his daughter financially qualified for the free-lunch program at her school, that he needed a better-paying position with which to raise his growing family.

His subsequent move to sales nearly 15 years ago taught him two more things about himself, the first being that he loved sales – especially if it was selling something that he truly believed in. The second thing he learned was that he is a “cause junkie.”

It was no wonder, then, that this 43-year-old, with a bachelor’s degree and two years of graduate study in music and choral conducting, found himself drifting toward a career in public television. Most recently, Sailors assumed the position of director and general manager of Eastern Illinois University’s WEIU Radio/TV Center, a career move which will allow him to combine his love of teaching with his love of sales -- and all for a good cause.

“The gifts I have been given are that of a builder,” Sailors said. “WEIU has faced some trials in recent years, and I look at this as an extraordinary opportunity to create a phoenix, so to speak.”

He’s quick to add, however, that unlike the tale of the phoenix where the magnificent bird dies, then rises from its own ashes to live a second life, the WEIU Radio/TV Center he has come to is far from being dead.

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Eastern Illinois University emphasizes distinguished teaching in the liberal arts, sciences and selected professions. A traditional, residential state university of recognized quality, Eastern enrolls more than 10,000 students in undergraduate and graduate programs. The university, located in Charleston, also serves the region through a variety of non-credit and off-site degree programs, as well as cultural and recreational opportunities. Eastern’s pursuit of excellence attracts well-qualified students of an increasingly diverse population and a teaching faculty active in research and public service who utilize the latest technology.

"Not that there is anything wrong with (WEIU's) past," Sailors said. "I'm just looking forward toward new directions and new opportunities."

Sailors is no stranger to public television. From his beginning as an underwriting account executive for KUAT-AM/FM/TV, at the University of Arizona in Tucson, he rose to director of corporate support and then director of national program development for KSPS Public Television in Spokane. In 1997, he became general manager of KSMQ Public Television, licensed by Austin (Minn.) public schools, and director of technology for the school district.

Slightly more than half-way through his first month on the job at Eastern, Sailors said he has several ideas concerning the future of WEIU "spinning their way around inside" his head. He will be looking for the best possible ways in which to incorporate those ideas.

"But it would be arrogant of me to come in and start making all kinds of changes without a thorough assessment of the center and its operations," he added. "There will continue to be some treading of water while this assessment takes place."

Sailors, who considers himself "very quality driven," does predict an emphasis on community programming which will focus on issues affecting both university- and non-university-affiliated viewers. Controversial issues such as teen suicide, gambling and restrictions on smoking could all be fair game on WEIU programming, he added.

Additional programming might include moderated discussion groups – "I think that kind of dialogue is important," Sailors said – and programs with a call-in format. "Generally phones were ringing non-stop most of the time," he added, recalling the popularity of call-in shows at former stations of his career.

Increased coverage of local athletic teams will be something else that area viewers can watch for. "One of our key responsibilities is our community. We want to provide them with the type of programming that people are interested in," Sailors said.

(WEIU-TV serves an 11-county area of East Central Illinois, and is available on cable systems in Mattoon, Charleston, Champaign, Effingham, Paris and Tuscola, among others.)

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RICK SAILORS

On a personal note, Sailors and his family, which includes wife, Tamsin, and six children, are eagerly adjusting to their new home in Charleston.

Of his job search, Sailors said, "I was looking for a not-for-profit operation and my family and I wanted to live in the Midwest in a college community of 20,000 to 50,000 people.

"I'm happy to say that we got all of that," he added.