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Remarks and Messages

Richard F. Wilson

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## For the Pantagraph: Annual Report

Richard F. Wilson  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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# Annual Report: Illinois Wesleyan connects with community



Richard Wilson

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In looking back over the past year, I am particularly proud of the many ways that our students, faculty and staff have put their talents and energies to work contributing to the quality of life for those of us living in McLean County and the surrounding area.

Many of the most noticeable connections we have with the community involve our music, theater and nursing programs and Titan teams. However, there are many more equally important, but less noticeable, ones we make as an institution and individuals. Following are a few examples of some of those activities that you might find of interest:

- The Give A Day Campaign is a new way to engage our students in service by having them commit a single day to work in the community. Midway through this academic year, the Give A Day program has produced 13,015 total hours of community service work by our students.
- The Action Research Center, which receives financial support from the State Farm Companies Foundation, couples students with more than 25 community partner organizations to work on a wide variety of short-term and long-term projects that are designed to help improve our community.
- The Shirk Center each year opens its door to more than 200 events for community groups ranging from the Special Olympics and high school competitions to the Illinois Sustainable Living and Wellness Expo and Police Candidate Testing.
- A small business workshop program was created this past year, offering a series of nine workshops to help budding entrepreneurs and small business owners become more successful.
- A fundraiser for women who were victims of domestic violence was created after one of our students interned at Bloomington's Crisis Nursery and wanted to continue helping these women. Another student secured a grant to create a Tool Library that lends local homeowners the tools they could not otherwise afford so they could make their own home repairs.
- Volunteer Saturday is an event our incoming first-year students take part in that sends them into the community for a day of service, where they assist our neighbors, the elderly and a variety of neighborhood and service groups.

- Tornado relief for Washington, Ill., was provided by more than 100 of our student-athletes and coaches, who lent a helping hand to local residents as they cleaned up after the devastating storm rolled through the community in November.
- Habitat for Humanity is a program our students have participated in for the past 19 years, building affordable housing along with Illinois State University students for residents of McLean County.
- Alternative spring and fall breaks send student volunteers into the community for service rather than to beachfront resorts. This past fall, a number of our students spent three days and two nights working and learning at the Western Avenue Community Center.
- The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Gospel Festival and Fellowship Dinner were hosted on the Illinois Wesleyan campus for the 24th time this year.
- The Illinois Wesleyan Civic Orchestra is an example of how our faculty and students have helped fill the void created when the Bloomington-Normal Symphony was disbanded in 1985.

In addition to these activities, every day you can find members of our faculty and staff serving the community on governmental bodies, lending their expertise to economic development agencies, contributing their talents to a variety of non-profit organizations, coaching youth athletic teams, leading scout troops and more.

Contributing to the quality of life in Bloomington-Normal not only benefits our friends and neighbors, but it also enhances the educational experience our students receive.

*Wilson is president of Illinois Wesleyan University.*