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Gary Egbers, Bloomington-Area Business Leader, Named President of Illinois Wesleyan Associates

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Packaging industry executive Gary Egbers has been named president of Illinois Wesleyan Associates, a group of about 470 business and professional leaders committed to supporting the university through scholarships, internships, and job opportunities for graduates.

Egbers, president of Commercial Packaging, Inc., is a member of Illinois Wesleyan University's Board of Trustees and a 1972 political science graduate.

He succeeds Bruce Callis, vice president of State Farm Insurance Cos., who died in March, as president of Illinois Wesleyan Associates. Egbers also succeeds Callis as chairman of IWU's Board of Trustees' Development Committee, a group focused on fund-raising, alumni, and public-relations issues affecting the university.

"I have big shoes to fill," Egbers said. "Bruce Callis was very successful in increasing the dollars contributed to the university and in heightening awareness about Illinois Wesleyan University.

"Bruce Callis brought class and dignity to whatever he did," Egbers added. "He was a polished professional."

IWU President Minor Myers, jr., said: "We are very pleased that Gary Egbers has accepted the presidency of Illinois Wesleyan Associates. He is the right person to lead the group into the 21st century because as a businessman he knows the value of making the right investments.

"The members of Illinois Wesleyan Associates are investors," Myers added. "They invest in a quality undergraduate education by supporting IWU and they invest in students through scholarships, internships that give students valuable work experience, and job opportunities for graduates."

Egbers' Goals

A key goal for Egbers as president of Illinois Wesleyan Associates is to meet the financial needs of all students attending IWU from McLean County. He also wants to make sure that the donors who support those students understand just how much their dollars are appreciated.

"Whether a donor contributes \$1 or \$100,000," Egbers said, "I want them to know that their support is truly appreciated. It's just like in an election, every vote counts--here every dollar counts."

Egbers believes internships for IWU students provided by members of Illinois Wesleyan Associates are a strong point of the program--and would like to see this effort expanded.

"As an employer," Egbers explained, "we regard interns as a resource. We think that students who have gone through the work environment start off [their careers] at a much faster pace, and they are more valuable employees in the long- and short-term."

Recalling IWU students who have interned at Commercial Packaging, Egbers said: "These students are bright and eager to learn--they are eager to contribute and that makes them a valuable resource."

Egbers' Philosophy

Egbers accepted leadership of Illinois Wesleyan Associates out of a spirit of social responsibility and an interest in nurturing future generations of IWU students.

"I'm a big believer in education," Egbers said. "I think the liberal arts education available at IWU helps provide students with a broad cultural base. Education also is the light at the end of the tunnel for lots of people--it helps to increase their standard of living."

"In some ways," Egbers added, "as an IWU graduate, I look at my education like a mutual fund--its value gets better over time, it's an incredible investment."

As chairman of Illinois Wesleyan Associates and the Board of Trustees' Development Committee, Egbers is deeply involved in fund-raising activities at the university. He encourages IWU supporters to routinely contribute to the university, as he does, through payroll deductions.

Illinois Wesleyan Associates

Illinois Wesleyan Associates was formed in 1953.

IWU Associates participate in many campus activities, including: McLean County Appreciation Day, pre-football game luncheon; Associates' luncheons with guest speakers; Meet-the-Titans basketball game and reception; university exhibits; music and drama productions; faculty and guest lectures; and athletic events.

Over the years, many celebrities have addressed Illinois Wesleyan Associates' gatherings, including: former British Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath; five-time Olympic Gold Medalist Bonnie Blair; Steve Bornstein, president and chief executive

officer of the ESPN television network; and David Gergen, former chief editor of *U.S. News & World Report* and a former White House staffer. Last month, Dave Kindred—a 1963 IWU graduate, who is a columnist for *The Sporting News* and *Golf Digest* magazines, and was named "National Sportswriter of the Year" in 1997—addressed Illinois Wesleyan Associates.

Egbers' Background

Before founding the Normal-based Commercial Packaging in 1982 Egbers worked for Texaco, Olin Kraft, and Champion, the paper manufacturer, where he won numerous sales and management awards.

Commercial Packaging is a regional-based supplier of paper and polyethylene bags, containers popularly used for a range of goods spanning microwave popcorn to pet food, fertilizer, seeds, and other items. Commercial Packaging, a manufacturer and distributor, is the largest distributor of microwave popcorn packages in the country. Among the company's clients are Growmark, A.E. Staley, Archer Daniels Midland, Kroger, Weaver popcorn, and Sam's Club.

"We're a fast-growing company within our geographic area and market," Egbers said, "and have experienced double-digit growth every year since we were founded."

Egbers was twice nominated as *USA Today's* "Entrepreneur of the Year."

Egbers and his wife, Jan, are the parents of Lori (Mrs. Jim Morris), who has two children; Aaron, a 1999 IWU graduate, who has two children with his wife, Lora; and four-month old twins, Thomas and Harrison. Jim Morris is vice president of sales and Lori Morris heads a separate Commercial Packaging division dealing with pig ears, which are premium pet treats at Commercial Packaging. Aaron is the firm's key accounts manager and is responsible for operations of the company airplane.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium.