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Rachel Hatch

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Contact: Rachel Hatch, (309) 556-3960

Look Beyond the Labels of Autism, Says Speaker

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Professor Temple Grandin knows her brain is wired differently than other people.

A professor of animal science at Colorado State University, Grandin has Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism. A best-selling author and advocate for the humane treatment of livestock, she is said to be one of the most accomplished adults with autism in the world. But it might be best to avoid using the term in front of her.

“Don't get hung up on these labels – autism, Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD. I get worried about really smart kids getting held back by these labels,” said Grandin, who was the keynote speaker for the President's Convocation at Illinois Wesleyan University on Wednesday, Sept. 10 in Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall. The Convocation marks the official beginning of the 2008-2009 academic year.

Grandin's talk was the culmination of the 2008 Summer Reading Program at Illinois Wesleyan. All first-year students at the University read the book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Vintage, 2004). Written by Mark Haddon, the novel's protagonist is a young boy with Asperger's Syndrome.

According to Grandin, many artists and scientists would be considered autistic. “Einstein didn't speak until he was 3 years old. That is a sign of autism,” she said. “You wouldn't have technology if there weren't people on the autistic spectrum. Many of these guys are the nerds that keep Silicon Valley and tech centers running. You would not have art and science if it were not for autistic genetics,” she said.

Grandin gave the audience insight into the minds of those with autism. She discussed different learning techniques and challenges autistic children face, drawing from her own experiences. A visual thinker, Grandin did not develop speech until she was 3-and-a-half years old. “When adults got to talking fast, I thought they had their own special language because I could not process it,” she said.

featured on major television programs, such as *ABC's Primetime Live*, the *Today Show*, *Larry King Live*, *48 Hours* and *20/20*, as well as in national publications, such as *Time* magazine, *People* magazine, *Forbes*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and the *New York Times*. She has also traveled on speaking tours around the world.

“It is often said that people with autism are interested in things, or objects, more than people,” said Grandin, “But people who are interested in things can do great things if we help them develop their strengths.”

For additional information about Grandin, visit her official Web site at www.templegrandin.com.

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