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IWU May Term, "On the Brink"

## ***A Civil Action* Lawyer and *Living Downstream* Author Lead the Way for May Term 1999 at IWU**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--As part of the lineup for May Term "1999: On the Brink" at Illinois Wesleyan University, prominent lawyer and environmentalist Jan Schlichtmann and ecologist, environmental activist, and poet Sandra Steingraber will lead the list of guest speakers, writers, dancers and musicians and other activities.

IWU's May Term is a month-long program where students study a single course intensively on campus, take a travel course, or work on an internship. This year, a total of 1,476 IWU students have enrolled in May Term '99.

All events are open to the public and most are free of charge.

Steingraber and Schlichtmann, who believe there is a link between environmental pollution and cancer, will voice their concerns about the cancer epidemic.

Steingraber, a 1981 IWU graduate, will speak on Tuesday, May 11, at 7:30 p.m. in the Main Lounge of Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University St., Bloomington. The title of her speech is "Living Downstream." "I'll basically be addressing the major themes of my book," said Steingraber, "along with the latest things I am researching--ecology in relation to pregnancy and childbirth."

On Wednesday, May 12, at 7:30 p.m., also in the Main Lounge of Memorial Student Center, Schlichtmann will speak on the national bestseller, *A Civil Action* by Jonathan Harr, now a movie starring John Travolta in the role of Schlichtmann.

Steingraber will introduce Schlichtman and join him for a question and answer session following his presentation.

Statistics show that in the United States, cancer is the number one killer of people in the 35 to 64 age group. According to research findings of the World Health Organization (WHO)--a group that maintains and studies death mortality data from approximately 70 countries--one-half of all the world's cancers occur among people living in industrialized countries. Also, a 1964 study conducted by two senior scientists at the U.S. National Cancer Institute, Wilhelm Hueper and W.C. Conway, concluded that "in 1950, 25 percent of adults in the U.S. could expect to get cancer in their lifetimes and today about 40 percent of the U.S. population (38.3 percent of women, 48.2 percent of men) can expect to get cancer."

### **About Jan Schlichtmann**

Schlichtmann came to national prominence in 1986 when he represented eight families against W.R. Grace and Beatrice Foods for contamination of the water supply in Woburn, Mass. In the early 1980s, there was a leukemia cluster in Woburn.

The book, *A Civil Action*, is based on this case and chronicles Schlichtmann's legal battle against the corporations charged with environmental pollution. The bestseller sold more than 1.5 million copies and the motion picture version of the book, starring actor John Travolta, was released in 1998. The film was given a "Two Thumbs Up" by film critics Siskel and Ebert and heralded in the Boston Globe as, "One of the most compelling legal thrillers of the decade." *A Civil Action* will be shown at the Normal Theater on Thursday, May 13, at 7 p.m.

The landmark case has been the subject of various national radio and television shows, including “60 Minutes” and “Nova.” It also has been widely covered in newspaper articles, magazines, legal and scientific journals and books, including *The Cluster Mystery: Epidemic and the Children of Woburn, Massachusetts*, and *No Safe Place*. The case is studied throughout U.S. law schools.

Schlichtmann, who is known for tackling complex civil litigations including product and toxic tort litigation, graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1973 from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In 1977, he earned a law degree from Cornell University. While attending law school, Schlichtmann clerked for the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee and taught a course in communications law at Cornell. On completion of his graduate studies, Schlichtmann joined the staff of the U.S. House Special Select committee on Assassinations as special counsel.

In 1978, Schlichtmann began his law practice in Massachusetts, and since has won several high-profile cases involving personal injury settlements and cases dealing with defective products, hotel fires, and medical negligence. In 1990, Schlichtmann helped author a version of the Massachusetts Hazardous Waste Cleanup Statute, which became a law in 1992. He has served on the faculty of the New England School of Law and Suffolk Law School’s continuing legal education program, and has been on the faculty of the National Judicial College, Reno, Nevada.

Schlichtmann, who has appeared on numerous radio and television programs, has participated in several public forums on issues of law, public policy and the environment and is involved in other litigations against environment hazards.

## About Sandra Steingraber

While attending IWU, Steingraber was treated successfully for bladder cancer. Later, she received a doctorate in biology from the University of Michigan and a master's degree in English from Illinois State University. Steingraber's first book, *Post-Diagnosis*, is a volume of poetry dealing with her fight against cancer. In 1997, she penned *Living Downstream*, a personal account of the affect of carcinogens in the streams, rivers, and air near Steingraber's hometown of Pekin, Ill.

*Living Downstream* was nationally acclaimed by critics, calling Steingraber the heir to Rachel Carson, who in 1963 received the Audubon Medal of the National Audubon Society for calling attention to the hazards of pesticides in her landmark book, *Silent Spring*. Like Carson, Steingraber addresses the sometimes controversial issue of the health effects of toxic chemicals released into the environment. She has been a featured guest on NBC's Today show, and in 1997, "Ms. Magazine" named Steingraber among its "Women of the Year."

In heavy demand as a public speaker, Steingraber was appointed in 1998 to President Bill Clinton's National Action Plan on Breast Cancer, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Steingraber taught biology for several years at Columbia College, Chicago. She held visiting fellowships at the University of Illinois, Radcliffe College and Northeastern University.

Steingraber also will teach a May Term course on biological issues in which "I will be relating this year's theme 'On the Brink,' to the environment by addressing communities that are on the brink of collapse because of the environment," said

Steingraber. “Usually where biology is concerned, we talk about how people destroy the environment. However, we’re going to look at it in reverse and examine how toxic environments destroy people. We are going to start by talking about the environmental crisis in Woburn, Mass., which concerns the link between leukemia and the environment.”

***Editor’s Note:*** *This news release is one of a series of stories about May Term at Illinois Wesleyan University.*