

# Tribute to a Legendry EIU!



William H. Zeigel

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You are aware that throughout the country, state legislatures have attempted and passed laws to reduce their budget deficits by decreasing their current employees and retirees' pensions (i.e. New Jersey, Colorado, Minnesota, South Dakota), in some cases significantly. In spite of the nearly 13 billion budget deficits in Illinois and a very persistent pension adversary group, the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago and their ally The Chicago Tribune, our contractual pension remains intact and most likely will continue that way unless the State declares bankruptcy. Over 700,000 current employees and retirees who are members of the Illinois five pension systems (State Employees, State Universities and Colleges Employees, Public School Teachers, Judges and General Assembly) owe this stability and security to a former Eastern Illinois University Faculty and Administrator, William H. Zeigel.

I visited with Bill Zeigel on April 21, 2006 after his wife, Fran's, Memorial Service in Charleston. He told me, that current EIU Employees and Annuitants have inherited a legacy and a commitment; the guaranteed pension, State Universities Annuitants Association and EIU Annuitants Association and to do our utmost to protect and preserve it, not only for now, but future generations as well.

He told me that after Social Security was ratified in 1936, states were given the authority to choose one of three options for their employees' retirement pensions: Social Security, Defined Contributions or Defined Benefits. In the first two options, the employee must contribute at least 6.2 % of his/her salary to a retirement account each month matched by the employer at exactly the same amount and same time each month to a retirement account. In the Social Security option, the deposit is to the Social Security Administration. In Defined Contributions, the deposit is to an account established by the employee such as a 401K. However, in Defined Benefits, the employer (State) withholds at least 6.2 % (in the case of Illinois 8% until 1986, and 9.45 % for those hired after that) of the employee's salary to be match by the state and managed by a state agency. Illinois chose the Defined Benefits Option in 1940. At first, Illinois met its obligation, but as the years went by, the State met less of its obligations to the State Pension Systems and some

years made no contributions. The Legislature called these years with no State contribution, only employee contributions, Pension Holidays.

Bill said the concern was growing in Illinois that if this trend continued, pension benefits would be significantly diminished. So, he and others organized a vigilant group of State employees and retirees in 1969. They campaigned and petitioned the Illinois Constitutional Convention in 1970 to either change the State's Pension System to Social Security or Defined Contributions, or alternatively, constitutionally guarantee the pension benefits agreed upon at the time of employment. After lengthy deliberations, instead of choosing either option that would obligate the State to pay its pension contributions on time, the Illinois Constitutional Convention constitutionally guaranteed the pension obligations as follows:

- **Ill. Const., 1970, Article X111, Section 5--“Membership in any pension or retirement system of the State, any unit of local government or school district, or any agency or instrumentality thereof, shall be an enforceable contractual relationship, the benefits of which shall not be diminished or impaired.”**
- Building on the momentum resulting from the success of the Constitutional Convention, on (9/20/71), William Zeigel, along with a group of statewide annuitants, established the State University Annuitants Association (SUAA) and became the second president of SUAA in 1972-73. He was a member of the committee that wrote the history of SUAA for its 20th Anniversary Celebration.
- Later that week (9/27/1971), 20 Eastern Illinois University Annuitants gathered in a room in the Student Union and organized the Eastern Illinois University Annuitants Association (EIUAA) Chapter. Bill was the first President of the EIUAA Chapter.

These are the legacies that Bill meant for us to preserve and protect. Bill also had a distinguished career at Eastern. In the following are excerpts from an interview with Bill Zeigel by Nathaniel West, Journal Gazettes- Times Courier Staff Writer in December 2004 at Bill's residence in Savoy, Illinois.

A Missouri native, Bill Zeigel worked as an educator from 1928 to 1937 in Kearney, Nebraska and Washington, D.C. He was hired at EIU in 1937 by President Robert Buzzard, the namesake for Buzzard Hall, as a professor of education. He said he came to EIU in 1937 when the Charleston campus consisted of only 4 main buildings and about 700 enrollment. He was also the first faculty to teach off-campus classes offered by Eastern. When Zeigel retired in August 1971, the campus population was about 8,000.

He saw many changes at EIU during the tenures of Buzzard and Doudna, both physically and academically. By requiring most professors to have their doctorates, Buzzard "raised the educational quality of teachers very greatly," said Zeigel.

And Doudna is still known as "The Builder" of EIU. During his tenure, the campus grew from 190 acres with 11 permanent buildings to 316 acres with 35 major buildings.

Among Zeigel's other well-known coworkers were: Franklyn L. Andrews (Andrews Hall); Mary Josephine Booth (Booth Library); Ruth Carman (Carman Hall); Charles H. Coleman (Coleman Hall); Walter A. Klehm (Klehm Hall); Charles P. Lantz (Lantz Gymnasium); Elizabeth K. Lawson (Lawson Hall); Florence McAfee (McAfee Gymnasium); Isabel McKinney (McKinney Hall); Edson H. Taylor (Taylor Hall); and Annie Weller (Weller Hall).

Beginning in 1942, Zeigel assumed other positions as well. Over the years, he was Director of Public Relations; Student Personnel and Admissions; and Placement. He became Associate Dean of Teacher Education and Placement in 1957, at which time he helped graduates find jobs at schools throughout the Midwest. He said that this was one of his most satisfying roles at EIU. In 1961, Zeigel became Dean of Student Academic Services. Two years later, he was named Vice President for Administration (now Vice President for Student Affairs). Former Illinois Governor and Eastern Alumnus Jim Edgar said "William Zeigel was the real nuts & bolts running the University."

His wife, Frances E. Zeigel, passed away April 17, 2006. She was 102 years old. Bill Zeigel passed away just three weeks later on May 8, 2006 in Savoy Illinois. June 1 would have been their 76<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. Their son, Robert Zeigel, was a first grader when his family moved to Charleston. He recalled walking with his father from their house at 923 11th Street to his classes at the University's Lab School, formerly located in Blair Hall. The father and son said they were both disappointed by the fire which severely damaged the historic building.

Zeigel was also active in the Charleston Rotary Club for 72 years. He served in Rotary International since 1932. As the District Governor of the 649 District, working with 48 other clubs, he organized the establishment of Charleston Rotary Pool. For his work with Rotary Club, he received the Paul Harris Service Award, the highest honor given by Rotary International. In October 2004, he was honored as the group's oldest member and Centenarian. He also received the District Rotarian of the Year Award.