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**The influential women of Coles County**

**Chairperson of the communication disorders & sciences department, Dr. Gail Richards**

**By: Brandon Campbell**

**Posted: 4/27/06**

Dr. Gail Richard is quite an accomplished woman. In addition to being a part of Eastern's faculty as a professor for the past 25 years, she has held the position of Chairperson in the Department of Communication Disorders & Sciences since 2000. Richard is also a nationally recognized authority and popular speaker on language disorders who has given seminars around the country.

Richard has also written seven clinical resource guides and created three standardized assessment tests which cover developmental disorders from autism to attention deficit disorder. As the head of the Department of Communication Disorders Richard's expertise in language disorders has helped her in overseeing the speech pathology clinic on the Eastern campus.

"It's exciting to me to be part of shaping the next generation of speech pathologists," she said. "I love teaching, which is why I do about 20 seminars a year."

Richard graduated from Augustana College in Rock Island, Ill., with a double major in speech pathology and theater in 1976. She received her master's degree from Eastern a year later and received her doctorate from Southern Illinois University in 1987.

"I just want to be the most qualified person I can, not necessarily singled out as male or female," she said. "I would be offended if I got something only because I was female as opposed to being a qualified individual."

Richard has also been an active tennis player throughout her life.

"I've always liked having a diversity of interests and I've tried to keep all three going," she said. "I coached tennis here for three years and am still involved with community theater. Plus, as I often tell students, having diverse outlets can keep you from burning out."

Richard's interest in athletics has lead her to serving as the NCAA Faculty Athletics Representative for EIU since 1994. As a member of the NCAA Richard serves on the official body which makes their legislative decisions.

"In the Ohio Valley conference I was one of the few female faculty athletic representatives," she said, "I can't say anyone ever discriminated against me for being female, but there were times I felt a little out of place. But sometimes that can work to your advantage as I am now sitting on the division one NCAA management council."

As a department head Richard has become an intermediary between handling her students' qualifications for certification and graduation, and running the speech pathology clinic.

"It's challenging in tight budget times to keep both going, but it's also very satisfying as our field changes and evolves to make sure we are cutting edge," she said. "In this particular discipline we are the premier in our field."

In her time at Eastern Richard hopes to make a lasting impression on both personal and professional levels.

"I hope that I've made a difference for some of these children and their families in sorting out their disabilities and getting treatment and intervention so they could reach their potential in life," said Richard. "It's what really keeps me going everyday."

"I also hope that I've had an impact on my profession," she said. "I hope that the people that are going to walk in my footsteps in the future will have learned from my experiences and benefited from my books, tests and articles."

Richard's notable awards include the Illinois Clinical Achievement Award, Outstanding Alumnus Award at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, Fellow of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and five Faculty Excellence Awards from EIU among numerous others.

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