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Australian ambassador to speak here

Dennis Richardson to be first speaker in annual series

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The Australian ambassador to the United States will kick off the 2009-10 Ambassador Series, a Springfield tradition that brings people face-to-face with ambassadors from around the world.

The world ambassadors, beginning with Dennis Richardson of Australia on Oct. 7, will share business, economic and political insights with their luncheon audiences. A question-and-answer session follows each presentation.

All six programs, which include a catered lunch, are at the Dove Conference Center at Prairie Heart Institute, 619 E. Mason St. Doors open at 11:30 a.m., and the programs begin at noon.

Vicki Megginson, associate chancellor for development at the University of Illinois Springfield, said 100 to 130 people have been attending the series, but the sponsors have increased their outreach this year.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we have more attend," she said.

She said a table for eight has been donated for the use of high school students and a teacher again this year, with use of the table rotating among local schools.

She said students from the ambassador's home country, as well as students with an educational relationship with the ambassador's country, sometimes also are invited.

WSEC videotapes all programs for broadcast on its network and for other Public Broadcasting System stations.

The series, sponsored by UIS and WSEC, the Springfield public television station, started in 1998 under the sponsorship of the Sangamo Club public affairs committee.

In 2003, WSEC public television and the University of Illinois Champaign International Programs and Studies Department, along with Prairie Heart Institute, assumed management.

When the Champaign group said prior to the 2007-08 series that it would no longer be a co-sponsor, UIS stepped in to partner with WSEC and Prairie Heart, Megginson said.

After a one-year hiatus, the series returned last year with ambassadors from Switzerland, New Zealand, South Africa, Norway and Ukraine, as well as the former U.S. ambassador to Mexico.

Megginson said UIS has a list of countries whose ambassadors haven't been recently involved in the series.

"We may send out 16 to 18 invitations, and the first six to confirm we will schedule," she said. "We go to Washington and have appointments with some of the embassies and deliver personal invitations."

Ambassadors generally don't get invited by communities to speak, so the series receives "a very kind and interested reception," she said.

The ambassadors are very aware that Springfield is the state capital, and they sometimes use their time here to interact with government offices, she said. In addition, many countries have a diplomatic office in Chicago, and the ambassadors visit there.

"We also find they like to come to Springfield because they're very interested in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum," Megginson said.

The sponsors ask each registrant to supply an e-mail address so last-minute notice of postponements can be sent out.

"They (the ambassadors) can be called home or to a crisis. That's why we have a date in May set aside if we have to reschedule," she said.

Chris Dettro can be reached at 788-1510.

Ambassador series schedule

The schedule for the 2009-10 UIS/WSEC Ambassador Series:

Oct. 7 — Dennis Richardson, ambassador to the U.S. from Australia

Nov. 10 — Michael Collins, ambassador from Ireland

Dec. 8 — Latchezar Petkov, ambassador from Bulgaria

Feb. 3 — TBA (in discussions with ambassadors from Korea, Kazakhstan or Colombia)

March 3 — Renee Jones-Bos, ambassador from The Netherlands

April 7 — Jean-Paul Senninger, ambassador from Luxembourg

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for the 2009-10 Ambassador Series are available by calling the UIS Office of Development at 206-6058. Callers can make reservations over the phone or request a registration form be sent to them.

The cost is \$108 per person, which includes lunch, for the six-ambassador series, or \$860 for a table of eight for the series.

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