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Governor nominates alumnus to be next UI trustee

By Tom Kacich

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SPRINGFIELD – Edward McMillan, a 1969 University of Illinois graduate in agricultural science from Greenville, is Gov. Pat Quinn's first nominee for appointment to the University of Illinois Board of Trustees, the governor's office confirmed Monday.

McMillan's name had been advanced by the UI alumni association and represents a return to the policy under which the association had input on appointments to the board. Last month, a group of state representatives with connections to the UI asked Quinn to confer with the alumni association before making appointments. And during a visit to the UI, Quinn said he would.

"I'm really honored and surprised that I've been selected," said McMillan, 63. "This was not something I was seeking.

"I have worked with the trustees, and I have reported to them on a variety of topics, most recently as chairman of the board of managers for the research parks in Champaign and Chicago. But I have not been seeking this. Apparently there were other people who put my name forward."

He described himself as a "political neophyte" who has "voted Republican most of my life." State campaign disclosure records show he has contributed only to the campaigns of his two state legislators. His company, McMillan LLC, gave $800 to the campaign of the recently retired Sen. Frank Watson, R-Greenville, and McMillan personally gave $1,600 over three years to the campaign fund of state Rep. Ron Stephens, R-Highland.

McMillan said he was first notified that he was under consideration for appointment to the board last Monday. On Thursday, he said, he learned he would be the nominee.

Once his appointment is confirmed by the Illinois Senate, McMillan will replace Bob Sperling, a Chicago attorney, on the UI board.

McMillan will be one of three downstaters on the board with voting rights. The other two are Robert Vickrey of Peru and David Dorris of LeRoy.

State Rep. Bill Black, R-Danville, who was one of the lawmakers who asked Quinn to consult with the alumni association about board appointments, said Monday he was pleased with McMillan's nomination.

"I commend Gov. Quinn for choosing someone who is a graduate of the University of Illinois and who came with the input of the alumni association and, especially, someone who is a downstater," Black said. "Hopefully we'll continue to allow the alumni association to have some input with trustees appointments."

Democrat Sen. Mike Frerichs of Champaign also was happy to hear of McMillan's appointment.

"I had given the governor a few different names of people from East Central Illinois," Frerichs said. "When I saw him last week, he said he wouldn't be nominating any of them. But I'm glad the governor picked someone from downstate Illinois with an ag background. I'm happy about that."

McMillan has served on the UI alumni association board, the UI Foundation board and has been chairman of the board of managers of the UI research parks for several years. He was a member of the search committee that in 2004 recommended B. Joseph White to head the UI. He was the president and chief executive officer of Purina Mills Inc. from 1988 to 1996. He spent 28 years with the company after graduating from the UI.

McMillan serves on six corporate boards and is the Bond County representative on the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority, a public board that encourages economic development in four Illinois counties east of St. Louis.

His company, McMillan LLC, focuses on helping carry out business mergers and acquisitions.

"I still bleed orange and blue," said McMillan, who estimated he visits Champaign-Urbana at least once a month for various

meetings, functions or athletic events.

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