



NEWS RELEASE

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Columnist to speak to high school writers

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Saundra Smokes, writer of the United Features Syndicate column, "Straight Talk," which appears in *The Evansville Courier*, will be the keynote speaker at 9 a.m. Friday, March 8, at the High School Press Day program in Mitchell Auditorium. Her topic will be "Coming of age in a society of shifting values."

Some 500 Tri-State high school students are expected to attend Press Day, which is sponsored by USI, The Evansville Courier Company, and the University of Evansville. Numerous concurrent workshops will be available to broaden the students knowledge of communications. Newspaper and yearbook awards will be presented by Vince Vawter, Courier editor, and Doug Cowles, regional representative for Jostens, at a 11:45 a.m. luncheon in the University Center. Dr. Dal M. Herring, chair of the USI Communications Department, has coordinated Press Day activities at USI.

Smokes is a native of Syracuse, where she joined the staff of the *Syracuse Herald-Journal* in 1978, after attending the University of Buffalo. She worked as a copy kid, typist, feature writer, city desk reporter, and copy editor. In 1987, she joined the paper's editorial board, the first woman and first person of color to hold such a position in the 150-year history of the paper.

In 1992, Smokes and her colleagues won first place in community service in a New York State Newspaper Publishers Association competition for a three-month series, "Taxpayers Held Hostage," which criticized New York state government. The series, inspired by Ms. Smokes, also received an Associated Press award.

In November 1992, she became the first person of color to become a columnist at the Syracuse newspapers. The column appeared until June 1995 and won AP awards in 1993 and
(more)

1994. Smokes signed with United Features Syndicate in 1994, and "Straight Talk" now appears in newspapers in California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, and Virginia. It also is carried on the Microsoft Network.

Smokes also is a playwright and has had two stage plays, *A Tribute to Motown* and *In Our Own Backyard*, and a video play, *Daddy's Home*, produced by the Syracuse-based Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company.

Concerned with the plight of the hungry, Smokes came up with the concept for the six-year-old "Project 52," in which local companies in Central New York conduct food drives to keep food pantries supplied. A committed Christian, she has taught Sunday School and has written her church's Christmas and Easter plays.