

14th Annual Dorothy & Eugene T. Butler Human Rights Award Harriet Swedlund

The City of Brookings will honor Harriet Swedlund as the recipient of the 15th annual Dorothy and Eugene T. Butler Human Rights Award on Thursday, September 25, 2014. Swedlund is being recognized for her work in bridging cultural differences and awareness through personnel interactions.

The Butler Human Rights Award presentation will be held in conjunction with the ABLE Awards for Accessibility and the Mayor's Awards for Historic Preservation at the Dakota Nature Center, 1705 32nd Street S, on Thursday, September 25th from 5 to 7 p.m., with the presentations beginning at 6 p.m. The public is invited to attend. Hors d'oeuvres and refreshments will be served.

Swedlund was instrumental in bringing speakers and programs from other countries to Brookings and arranging for Brookings residents to travel to other countries. This allowed individuals to learn about a culture different than their own, thereby eliminating stereotypes and misconceptions. Harriet served as director of SDSU's International Program from 1994 to 2003. She was then executive director of the South Dakota World Affairs Council (SDWAC) from 2005-2012. Currently, she is serving as a secretary of SDWAC Board.

"For Professor Swedlund, all cultures are one culture," said Nels Granholm, outgoing chairperson for the SDWAC board. "We are all alike in many ways and each of us deserves to be respected and afforded the human rights deserving of all people," Granholm continued.

The "Travel to Turkey" project was a program that Swedlund was able to bring to South Dakota. This program sponsored by the Turkish Cultural Foundation facilitates travel for middle and high school teachers to visit Turkey and then share their experiences in the classroom. It was viewed as a long-shot for South Dakota to participate in this program. Swedlund was able to convince the Turkish Cultural Foundation to give South Dakota a try. To date, 29 South Dakota teachers traveled to Turkey – including four from the Brookings school system and one each from Volga, Elkton and Madison. "The net effect of this program has been huge," said Swedlund. The program has a big contribution in enabling elementary and secondary school students to understand globalization and diversity.

Other programs Swedlund accomplished were faculty and student exchanges between SDSU and universities in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America and Canada; arranging visits and presentations by ambassadors and foreign policy specialists from other countries and annual SDWAC symposia on countries like Brazil, Russia, India, South Korea and China.



When asked how cultural interactions have improved human rights for people, Swedlund cited an example from the exchange programs with China. During the first exchanges the Chinese were cautious in their interactions with Americans. Now, the Chinese students have less apprehension, thus making it easier for them to come here. In the past, Chinese university_students were assigned to their occupation and preferred location. Now, Chinese students have more freedom in selecting their majors and career choices. Being able to determine your future is a basic human right, Swedlund said. Swedlund also emphasized that opening up education to everyone is a basic human right.

When asked about her favorite culture, Swedlund demurred. Instead, she compared her academic area of textiles to cultures. She has collected fabrics from every country she visited. Comparing the designs in the fabrics, she sees similarities, but each culture has its unique way of creating these designs by variations in dyes, weaving, and embroidery. While all cultures deal with food, education, roles of men and women, government, etc., each has its unique customs.

Swedlund's interest in cultures was piqued by reading a series of books entitled *Twins* (about twins in other countries) while growing up in Redfield, SD. She realized that South Dakota was very monocultural. Swedlund's aunt who loved to travel served as a role model. Swedlund has now traveled to 35 countries.

Swedlund obtained her bachelor's (1954) and master's (1957) degrees in textiles and clothing from Iowa State University. While teaching at Iowa State in the 1960s, the dean of home economics arranged an exchange program with India which opened Swedlund's eyes.

Swedlund joined the faculty of SDSU's Apparel Merchandising and Interior Design Department in 1984. She had a graduate student from China that encouraged her to visit China. When SDSU started its first exchange program with Yunnan Normal University in China, Harriet and her husband Dean took advantage to travel to Yunnan in 1993 to teach English. Both of them had many face-to-face interactions with the local Chinese.

Swedlund was involved in the curriculum development of SDSU's Global Studies major in 2004. In 1993 then Provost Carol Peterson asked Harriet to become acting director of the Office of International Programs. Swedlund started this position on a part-time basis and in 2002 became its full-time director. When Harriet retired from SDSU, she became executive director of the South Dakota World Affairs Council.

Swedlund advised that when traveling one needs to spend time in a country in order to totally learn all aspects of that country.

The Dorothy and Eugene T. Butler Human Rights Award is named after the Butlers, in recognition of their lifelong advocacy in human rights issues on the local, regional, national and international levels. The annual award recognizes significant volunteer efforts on behalf of human rights. Previous honorees, in addition to Dorothy and Eugene T. Butler, Jr., are Phil and Winnie Baker, First United Methodist Church, Rev. Carl Kline, Rev. Scott Miller and Lisa Wolff, Margaret Denton, Dr. Steve Marquardt, Lawrence Novotny, Dr. Charles Woodard, Dr. Geoffrey W. Grant, Dr. Timothy Nichols, Scott Nagy, Dr. Ann Marie Bahr and Phyllis Cole-Dai.