

SWEDISH
COUNCIL
of America



Recognizing the Heroes of Swedishness

By Gregg White

Like Vilhelm Moberg's Karl-Oskar and Kristina, many were the Swedes who emigrated from the rock-strewn farms of Småland to Minnesota in search of a better life. Duluth high school music teacher, Glenn Peterson, counts his forbears among them. That is why he became the driving force in creating Duluth's Sister City relationship with Växjö, the county seat for that area of Sweden.

As head of the Växjö Committee for three decades, Glenn facilitated annual official exchanges, aided in the launch of a sculpture exchange, as well as an exchange between Växjö Konsthall and the University of Minnesota – Duluth's Tweed Museum. With Glenn's tireless leadership,



Glenn and Erna Peterson flanked by their children, Neal and Naomi. Photo: Gregg White

Duluth Sister Cities International sponsored numerous music performances including the Royal Swedish Opera, the Royal Swedish Army Band, the *Orphei Drängar*, and a tour by Karl-Oskar Boys Choir (funded, in part, by an SCA Grant). And this does not even begin to mention the Duluth-Växjö Soccer Exchange through which American youth travel to Sweden and use athletics as a means of creating relationships that bridge language and cultural barriers, or the various educator exchanges between UMD and Linnaeus Universitet!

In its nomination of Glenn for an SCA Award of Merit, DSCI wrote, "Glenn Peterson is the embodiment of the Swedish Council of America's mission statement, in every endeavor that he embarks on he works to bring Sweden and an understanding of its language and heritage into the picture, connecting people and places in the process and forever striving to help bring further awareness of Swedish culture." The SCA Award of Merit was created expressly to give national recognition to stellar volunteers like Glenn.

Fortunately, while impressive, Glenn's contributions to Swedishness in America are not unique. Another recent

SCA Award of Merit recipient is Dan Hanson, President of the Swedish Club of Detroit. SWEA Michigan nominated Dan because they have been impressed by his tireless dedication to promoting and maintaining the Swedish Club over the years. With steady enthusiasm, Dan works closely with other local Swedish and Scandinavian organizations to maintain positive links between them.

Another SWEA Michigan nominee who received the SCA Award of Merit is Christina Bakalis, a long-time member of their club. Christina has worked tirelessly as a member and leader of the local SWEA chapter. Christina is always willing and happy to assist making SWEA events successful and enjoyable for everyone. She even manages to add a personal touch to all her commitments, such as when she added a new sandwich to the Christmas Fair, which was a huge success. Christina also opened the Svenska Café in Birmingham, now a popular place for Swedes to gather.



Lisa Reierson, Jill Pearson Reider, Ken Johnson & Janice Williams. Photo: SAHS/WM

At its recent meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Swedish Council of America bestowed four additional SCA Awards of Merit at the Swedish American Heritage Society of West Michigan's 20th Anniversary Celebration. The honorees – Ken Johnson, Jill Pearson Reider, Lisa Reierson and Janice Williams – were all nominated by SAHS/WM and all are current or past leaders of the organization and remain unflagging volunteers. These heroes know how to promote Swedishness in America!



The SCA Award of Merit goes to individuals who have been nominated by one or more of their local Swedish-American organizations for national recognition for their outstanding contributions and hard work within their local community. You can learn more about SCA Awards for individuals and organizations on our website. www.swedishcouncil.org