

# Foreign SERVICE

## No life of leisure for Food Prize head

By Gene Lucht

Iowa Farmer Today

**D**ES MOINES — This isn't quite where Ken Quinn pictured himself.

When Quinn, who grew up in Dubuque, joined the U.S. Foreign Service more than 35 years ago, he saw himself sipping aperitifs in some salon in France.

"I didn't know what an aperitif was," Quinn says as he thinks back. "But,



Bringing vision to Food Prize page 8

that was just the image I had of the Foreign Service."

Instead, Quinn spent much of his career dodging bullets and wading through the rice paddies of places such as Vietnam, occasionally venturing back home to work on refugee issues or other items.

He eventually rose to become U.S. ambassador to Cambodia,

then left government work to become president of the World Food Prize Foundation.

It could be said he's done



IFT photo by Gene Lucht

as much to fight hunger and suffering as just about anyone of his generation — although Quinn doesn't go that far.

The road to this office overlooking downtown Des Moines

**Kenneth Quinn is president of the World Food Prize Foundation, which honors scientists and others who work to feed people around the world. Winners receive \$250,000, as well as a copy of the sculpture shown here that rests at World Food Prize headquarters in Des Moines.**

## Trio of Iowans lead fight against world hunger

### ◆◆◆Hunger

From page 1

But, who follows in those rather large footsteps?

This week, Iowa Farmer Today profiles a handful of the state's natives who are making their mark as humanitarians and also a program that is trying to produce the next generation of Iowa humanitarians.

Isn't that part of what agriculture is supposed to be about?

Of course, the small list of people we talk about this week isn't perfect and it isn't complete. It doesn't include any of the important agribusiness leaders who have made a difference in their industries and, thus, helped push the business community — people such as Chris Nelson, Tom West, Ted Crosby, Leroy Hanson or

George Andrel. It also doesn't include any of the state's eminent researchers, many of whom labor at the major universities in the state, people such as John Pesek, Stephen Howell or Catherine Woteki.

But, it does include some people who are making a difference now and some who we believe will make a difference in the future.

And, that does honor to the previously named trio; Hoover and Wallace and Borlaug.

For those who don't know their history, Hoover too often is remembered as a failed president who is blamed for the Great Depression of the 1930s, a conservative who is derided by liberals.

Wallace too often is remembered as a vice president who was attacked as soft on communism, a liberal who is made

fun of by conservatives.

Only Borlaug is lauded consistently on all sides of the political spectrum.

But, all three were brilliant — or are brilliant in the case of Borlaug, who still labors daily fighting world hunger — and all three were great humanitarians.

Hoover, before he became president, was an accomplished mining engineer who headed efforts to feed Europe during and after World War I, when famine threatened millions. After he left the presidency, he again worked to fight famine during and after World War II.

Wallace, before he became vice president, was an editor of Wallace's Farmer Magazine, founder of the company that became Pioneer Hi-Bred International, and perhaps the most

influential USDA secretary in history.

Both before and after his time in the vice presidency, he traveled the world working to eliminate world hunger. His feats laid the groundwork for the later efforts of Borlaug in the Green Revolution.

Of course, Borlaug's story is more recent and is better known. He helped develop and adapt strains of wheat that started the Green Revolution.

A 1970 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Borlaug later founded the World Food Prize. He is credited with saving a billion lives worldwide.

The Iowans we feature and who are still laboring unrecognized or who are still growing up have big shoes to fill if they are to continue the Iowa legacy started by Hoover, Wallace and Borlaug.

# Detour on return to safe life

## ◆◆◆Quinn

### From page 3

Moines began in the Bronx, New York, where Quinn was born. But, he moved to Dubuque as a youth, eventually graduating from Dubuque Wahlert High School and Loras College.

He went on to earn advanced degrees at Marquette and Maryland before joining the foreign service.

"I didn't really know what a diplomat did," Quinn says now.

Instead of attending soirees in a tuxedo, he got on a plane to Vietnam, where he was put in charge of a district.

"I was 26 or 27, dropped off in the Mekong Delta with maybe a year of language training," he says. "It was November of 1968, and it wasn't at all obvious to me just what the job of an adviser was."

But, he figured it out. After about two years there, he was ready to return to the United States to study labor trends and live a safer life.

That's when he had what he calls his "Paul on the

*"He said, 'You're in the middle of the epic adventure of your generation, and you're going to go off and sit in some embassy. Why would you want to do that?'"*

**Ken Quinn**  
**World Food Prize Foundation**  
**President**

road to Damascus epiphany."

Dick Swanson, a reporter from Time Magazine, came to see him. As they traveled on a small boat down the Mekong River, Quinn explained about his work in Vietnam, building roads and bringing economic development to the area's peasants.

"I remember on this boat. It was rainy and grey," he says, remembering the scene.

The reporter asked him about his plans, and Quinn told him about going back to the United States to study labor trends. It was then Swanson asked him a blunt question.

"He said, 'You're in the middle of the epic adventure of your generation, and you're going to go off and sit in some embassy. Why would you want to do that?'"

Quinn sat there, stunned at the thought. He turned to Swanson and replied, "I don't know why I'd want to do that."

So, he didn't.

Instead, Quinn dedicated his career to the dirty work of statesmanship, often in parts of the world where most people tried to avoid. He spent a total of about six years in Vietnam, and discovered the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Eventually, he returned

to Washington, D.C. From 1978 to 1982, he lived in his home state and assisted then-Gov. Robert Ray in the effort to bring Vietnamese refugees to Iowa.

Quinn later worked on POW/MIA issues and spent time with the United Nations on international narcotics and Palestinian refugee issues.

He remembers getting shot at in the Gaza Strip and spotting PLO hideouts in the area.

Then, it was back to Washington and to the Philippines, where he was deputy ambassador. Eventually, he spent about 3 1/2 years as ambassador to Cambodia before he returned to Iowa to take over the helm at the World Food Prize in late-1999.

The Dubuque boy had come full circle.

Now, Quinn, who had circled the world and made a difference, has a chance to elevate the World Food Prize to the place of respect and recognition Norman Borlaug, Nobel Prize laureate and Iowa native, imagined when he started it in the late-1980s.

## Nominations sought for Spencer Award

**A**MES — Do you know a farmer who is truly top-notch in the field or at the farmers market? Do you know an educator or researcher whose work has helped Iowa's family farm-

ers stay in business?

The Leopold Center is seeking nominations for the 2005 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture, one of Iowa's largest awards recognizing sustainable agriculture.

Nominations are due March 31.

The Spencer Award recognizes a farmer, researcher or educator who has made a significant contribution toward the stability of mainstream family farms in Iowa.

Contributions can be practical improvements in a family-owned farming operation, research projects, or educational activities and other work that have led to the ecological and economic sustainability of Iowa's family farms.

The first award was presented in 2002 to David and Amy Petersen who own and operate a dairy farm near Blue Grass in southeast Iowa.

The 2003 award went to beef producers David, Diane and Dresden Petty of Eldora and Boone County farmers Dick and Sharon Thompson received the 2004 award.

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