

Dr. Mario T. Soria – Bolivia Mario was born in la Paz, Bolivia. He attended Baldwin Wallace College in Cleveland, where he received a B.A. in Psychology and Education. He then pursued post-graduate studies at Case Western Reserve University and received his Ph.D. in Latin American Civilization and Literature. In 1969, Dr. Soria moved with his wife and four children to Des Moines where he acted as a Professor and Chairperson of the Foreign Languages Department at Drake University. Believing strongly that a college student's experience is deeply enriched by studying abroad, Dr. Soria worked diligently to increase student use of study abroad programs. He retired in 1991 but has since continued to help students obtain meaningful learning experiences by acting as Director of the Institute of Italian Studies in affiliation with Drake University. Dr. Soria continues to publish and present at conferences on the topic of Latin American Theater.

Elizabeth Salinas Newby – Mexico Born one block inside the U.S. border to Mexican parents, Elizabeth began her life working in the U.S. as a migrant farm worker. She received her education in many different schools as she and her family traveled around the U.S. working. She attended twenty-two different elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. At age eighteen, she left home against her parents' wishes to pursue a college education. She graduated from Ball State University with an MA in Counseling Psychology. She has since applied her degree to become a licensed social worker, a family development specialist, and a diversity and cultural consultant. Elizabeth was appointed by the Iowa governor to be an administrator to the Iowa Division of Latino Affairs of the Department of Human Rights. Her areas of expertise include interpreting, working with children of sexual abuse, and multicultural counseling. Elizabeth has received awards for working with children, sexually abused women, and has a long life history of advocating on behalf of migrant workers. She has also published several books.

Fasil Kebede – Ethiopia Originally from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Fasil is the oldest of seven siblings. He traveled to Des Moines, Iowa, in 1972 to attend school at Grandview Junior College. He then went on to attend the University of Northern Iowa and Wartburg College, where he received a degree in business. Fasil worked many jobs while attending university to support his educational endeavors. He now works for the Iowa Department of Justice where he represents Iowa consumers in utility related matters. While attending UNI, Fasil co-founded the UNI Soccer Club, a passion he continues to pursue in the Des Moines community. Fasil started coaching soccer for the Northwest Soccer Club in 1991. In addition to coaching responsibilities, Fasil is a referee and supports the Northwest Soccer Club by officiating at soccer games. He is also active in his faith community and was an early supporter of Wellspring Community Church.

Dr. Kumsan Ryu Song – South Korea Dr. Song graduated from Seoul, South Korea's Koryo University College of Medicine in 1952. She then moved to the U.S., where she began an internship in Texas followed by residencies in St. Louis and Chicago. In 1965, she and her husband moved to Des Moines, and she pursued a career in Hematology in the Pathology Department of Mercy Hospital. Dr. Song then worked as a clinical instructor at the Des Moines University Osteopathic Medical College. She eventually settled into her final role at Drake University as a Certified Art Therapist. Dr. Song served as a Subcommittee Chair for the Iowa-Yamanashi Sister State as well as the Program Director for the Asian American Council of Iowa. She was on the Board of Directors for the Morris Scholarship, the Banker's Trust Co., Iowa Asian Alliance, and the Korean Cultural Center. In addition, Dr. Song represents the Des Moines district in the Commission for Religion and Race under the Iowa United Methodist Conference.

Sahar Al-Shash – Syria Sahar was born in Damascus, Syria and studied French Literature at the University of Damascus. In 1976, she moved to the U.S. with her husband. Until 1998, Sahar stayed home with her four children throughout their schooling, actively participating in school programs and activities. She always had a passion for fashion and quickly became frustrated with Iowa's lack of variety in clothing. Sahar began to research the prospects of opening a fashion and beauty business. She spent time gathering fashion and beauty industry data, Iowa market trends, and expert advice gained by meeting and working with fashion designers, clothing manufacturers, and experienced spa personnel. In August of 1999, her determination and hard work led to her opening the doors of Sahar's Continental Shops, providing Des Moines with the ultimate fashion, beauty, and spa experience. Sahar's is the only business in Iowa where customers can find clothing from Italy, enjoy a Swedish massage, and relax with a cappuccino.