



Opening Doors. Books. Minds.

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June 30, 2016

Dear Sages Over 70 Selection Committee:

It is time to honor Elaine Estes as a Sage Over 70 for her many years of contributions to making our community culture more vibrant, responsive to the needs of all, and respectful of historic preservation.

Elaine's remarkable thirty-seven year career as a Des Moines Public Library employee, seventeen years as Director, greatly benefited central Iowa. Appointed Library Director in 1978, she was the first female director since 1928, and the only African American to hold this position.

Elaine's career was one filled with many "firsts." During her tenure, she was active in defeating censorship, increasing access for all, and protecting patrons' privacy. With her strong leadership, Iowa was the first state to pass legislation protecting patrons' library records. The Des Moines Public Library was first in the country to have a materials preservation program and a disaster preparedness plan. The first and only bond issue in the library's 150-year history, was passed due to Elaine's efforts and resulted in the first automated library system.

She helped develop the first Book Mobiles and consolidated thirty-two library branches to four larger branches. While the Director, the new Forest Avenue and North Side libraries were constructed. The first Chinese New Year celebration held in Des Moines was organized by Elaine in response to the growing Asian population.

The restoration of the eighty-eight year old historic main library, took a public-private fundraising effort and Elaine's perseverance and vision. The result was the first parking attached to the building, new services including a handicapped entrance, reading equipment for the visually challenged, and drive-up service for the mobility challenged.

A world traveler, Elaine served on the Sister City Commission and the Sister State Commission. After retiring from the Des Moines Public Library in 1995, Elaine volunteered to provide leadership for the development of policy and a governance structure for an English language library in Merida, Yucatan.

A distinguished library career is just one aspect of the 84-year old Elaine's dynamic life. A passion for historic preservation and antiques has led her to serve on the State Historic Preservation Review Board, National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Endowment Grant Review Board, the City of Des Moines Historic District Commission, the Terrace Hill Society/Commission, and the Salisbury House Preservation Committee.

Elaine's dedication to the importance of a rich cultural tradition led her to share her time and talents on the Des Moines Art Center Board, the Civic Center Board, the Cultural Affairs Advisory Board, and the Des Moines Community Playhouse Board. It never ceases to amaze me the number of events and programs Elaine attends and supports.

It is my great pleasure to share my respect and admiration for Elaine Estes. Her great love of books, libraries, and education; her magnificent sense of style; her zeal for treasuring the past through antiques and preservation; all exemplifies Elaine's dedication to her community and the State of Iowa. Every time I am in Elaine's presence, I learn something new from her – even if only to realize the importance of grace and a life richly lived.

Thank you and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Dory Briles". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dory Briles