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Wayne Johnson

Wayne Johnson was the Bureau Chief at the Bureau of Refugee Services from March 1989 until January 2007 when he retired. He first visited Southeast Asia in the Peace Corps and has had a long career working with refugees.

His American parents were in Canada when he was born in 1941. His family moved to Algona when he was in high school.

From 1959 to 1963, Johnson attended Drake University, majoring in political science. In 1964 he joined the US Peace Corps, which sent him to Indonesia where he was a club track coach. Johnson's involvement in sports continued from 1964 to 1967 as a men's track coach for the Thai National Track Team at Bangkok, Thailand. From 1967 to 1969, he worked in the Agricultural Development and Credit Program for USAID, the US Agency for International Development, in Laos. During some of his time there, he was, as he puts it, "a used water buffalo salesman." Johnson first worked with refugees in 1969 in Laos, where he was refugee relief coordinator and air operations manager for USAID until 1975.

Stateside in 1976, Johnson got a BA in Southeast Asian Politics from the University of California at Santa Cruz, and then worked for several years in the private sector.

In 1979, Johnson became Lao section coordinator for the US Refugee Processing Program for the International Rescue Committee in Bangkok, Thailand. In 1981, he came to Des Moines as a regional consultant for refugee resettlement for Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. In 1985, he joined the State of Iowa refugee program as deputy bureau chief. Johnston took over as bureau chief in 1989, where he remained until January 2007, when he retired.