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Kenneth M. Quinn

Kenneth Quinn is a transplant to Iowa, but just like the refugees he has befriended, he became an Iowan.

Quinn was born in 1942 in New York. His family moved to Dubuque, IA in 1956 where he would earn a BA in political science from Loras College. In 1965, he received a Master's degree in political science from Marquette University.

In August 1967, Ken Quinn joined the American Foreign Service in the U.S. State Department. Until 1999, he worked to advance American interests overseas. His first assignment was in Vietnam. His last was as Ambassador to Cambodia from 1996 to 1999. In 1982, he earned a PhD from the University of Maryland in government and politics. His dissertation was on Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge communist leader who took over and devastated Cambodia. As early as 1974, Quinn was the first to identify and report on the genocidal policies and practices of the Khmer Rouge.

In the beginning of his foreign service career, from 1968 to 1974, Quinn was a Rural Development Advisor in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. His various assignments have included serving on Henry Kissinger's National Security Council staff at the White House, special assistant to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and four years as Chair of the Inter-agency Task Force on POW/MIAs.

Through a State Department special exchange program, Quinn returned to Iowa and worked on Governor Robert Ray's staff from 1978 to 1982. He worked on Indochinese resettlement and was Executive Director of Iowa SHARES, which sent doctors, nurses, medical supplies and food to Cambodia and refugee camps in Thailand. He also acted as the governor's liaison with the National Guard and as disaster coordinator.

When Governor Ray left office, Quinn returned to active duty in the Foreign Service. Over the next 18 years, he had assignments in the Philippines, the Middle East and Cambodia. In 1997, while Ambassador to Cambodia, a rocket struck his family's residence in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

At his retirement, Quinn could look back on a career distinguished with many awards and honors including the Presidential Distinguished Service Award, the highest recognition that can be given career State Department officers; the Meritorious Honor Award at the White House for work helping refugees escape from Vietnam at the end of the war; and the Secretary of State's Award for Heroism and Valor for efforts to protect American citizens exposed to danger in Cambodia, as well as four life-saving rescues he was part of in Vietnam.

In 2000, Quinn became President of The World Food Prize Foundation based in Des Moines.