

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Mary E. Hall

Phone: 215-249-0100, x119

Fax: 215-249-9657

Email: mhall@pearlsbuck.org



[Hilltown, PA] FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 28, 2020

Pearl S. Buck International Celebrates Julie Henning at 2020 Woman of Influence Award Dinner and Ceremony

Pearl S. Buck International and more than 150 friends and family celebrated educator, advocate, and author Julie Henning as the 2020 Woman of Influence at a socially-distanced dinner and ceremony on Thursday, September 24, 2020 in the Pearl S. Buck International Estate Pavilion. The event was also livestreamed over the internet to those who could not attend in person.

Woman of Influence was originally slated for May but had to be rescheduled this year due to the ongoing COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Each year the Woman of Influence Award honors Pearl S. Buck International's founder, Pearl S. Buck, by recognizing women who continue in her humanitarian, advocacy, and leadership footsteps. Pearl Buck is especially close to the heart of this year's recipient, as Julie Henning was raised in Bucks County as Ms. Buck's daughter.

Mrs. Henning, who was born in South Korea to a Korean mother and an American soldier father during the Korean War, was brought to America at age 14, after the death of her mother, to live with Pearl S. Buck. She worked for 25 years as a middle-school math teacher in the Souderton Area school district. Today, she has a family of her own. Together with her husband Doug Henning, pastor of First Baptist Church of Perkasie, she raised two sons, who are now married to wonderful wives and who have given her five energetic grandsons. All of Mrs. Henning's family turned out Thursday to celebrate her receiving the Woman of Influence award.

Mrs. Henning loves to share her story of hope and grace with churches and civic organizations, speaking at more than 350 of them, and she also shares her inspirational story with schools. She continues to advocate for Amerasians through newspaper articles, radio interviews, national television, and U.S. Congressional hearings. In 2019, she followed Pearl Buck in her footsteps of author, with the publication of her memoir, *A Rose in a Ditch*.

The evening was inspiring and heartwarming as Mrs. Henning spoke about her experience living in poverty, growing up mixed-race in Korea, and how her life changed thanks to sponsors, donors, and Pearl S. Buck. "It was difficult enough that we were very poor," Mrs. Henning noted of her childhood, "but people of the community, especially children, didn't make our lives any easier. I was often teased, ridiculed, and called many different names such as Yankee Devil Go Home. You have to understand how proud Koreans are of their pure race and their orderly nation. Consequently, mixed race persons like myself were despised and not wanted by my motherland."

"My mother loved me dearly and she always wanted me to study hard in school and go to America someday," she said. "I did well in school, but we had no financial means for me to ever continue my education and my mom was so very concerned about what would become of me. You see, no Korean man of right mind would marry a mixed-race person like myself and without an education, my future looked bleak. But one day, a social worker came to our town and the reason is because of a lady named Pearl S. Buck," who had been moved during a visit to Korea by the plight of Amerasian children to start the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, now Pearl S. Buck International, to help them. "I left my mom, the only person in this whole wide world who ever loved me, and I went to live in Pearl S. Buck Opportunity Center."

After her mother died, Mrs. Henning grief led to her throwing herself into her studies, and she finished first out of 600 students. "Ladies and gentlemen," she explained, "I'm not very smart. I was just scared. I was lonely. I was hungry. I thought perhaps through an education I might have a future, and this was noticed by Pearl Buck. And when she came to Korea, she met with me and she asked me through an interpreter, how would you like to come to America to live with me as my daughter? It was like a Cinderella story."

"I am truly grateful that Mother Pearl brought me to America where I am not scorned for being of mixed race," she continued. "But more than anything, she just loved me as I was. ... My prayer is the good work that Mother Pearl has begun will continue with some of our help, so that Pearl S. Buck International can continue to provide equality and education, better nutrition, and health care. I know that we cannot help all children, but we can help some children. And the children that we have helped, to that child, it will make all the difference. Who knows whether those who you have helped might be standing here one day, thanking you for the great difference you made in their lives."

Pearl S. Buck International® provides opportunities to explore and appreciate other cultures, builds better lives for children around the globe and promotes the legacy of our founder by preserving and interpreting her National Historic Landmark Home.

- END -

High res versions of all photos available upon request:



1. Julie and Doug Henning with their grandsons at the 2020 Woman of Influence Award dinner



2. Julie Henning with her family – husband Doug Henning, two sons and daughters-in-law, and five grandsons, at the 2020 Woman of Influence Award dinner



3. Julie Henning is presented with the Woman of Influence award by David Navazio, Chair of the Pearl S. Buck International Board of Directors. Pearl S. Buck International President and CEO Anna Katz looks on at the Sept. 24 event.