

Honoré Award Recipient



The 2015 recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award is Stephan L. Honoré, a 1956 graduate of Urbana High School. He was a student leader at Urbana and continued that involvement as a student at Capital University, including student body president his senior year. That sense of leadership and community involvement has continued throughout his life.

Honoré graduated from Capital University in 1960 with a double major in physics and mathematics. After attending The Ohio State University, where he began work on a masters degree, he joined the Peace Corps as one of the first twenty-seven volunteers and the first Ohioan. From 1961 to 1963, he served in Colombia which was, as Honoré put it, “a life changing experience.” He and his fellow volunteers were assigned to work with Colombian counterparts in rural community development. They motivated and organized rural community residents to carry out self-help improvement projects such as building roads, aqueducts, community centers, and organizing cooperatives for farmers and fishermen. Along the way, they were teaching basic concepts of local democracy and group action that most of us take for granted here in the U.S.

His public service continued when the Peace Corps offered him a staff job. Honoré once again worked with the Peace Corps as Associate Director in the Dominican Republic. By this time, the 1965 Dominican Revolution had broken out. Honoré led a group of Peace Corp nurses and urban community development volunteers in helping staff Dominican hospitals that cared for the wounded during that civil conflict. He was assigned to travel from the Peace Corps home base, through areas in conflict, to the hospitals to see that volunteers were safe and supplied with food and materials. After the United States intervened with Marines and the 82nd Airborne, the nurses found themselves removing American bullets from some of the wounded. Fearing for volunteer safety because of rising anti-American sentiments, Honoré was ordered by his superiors to evacuate the volunteers from two hospitals in the conflict zone to safer locations in the International Security Zone. When he went to remove the volunteers, they refused to leave, and the Dominican doctors pleaded with him not to take them, saying they could not run the hospitals without the help of the volunteers and that they would protect them with their bodies, if necessary. They remained on the job. As it turned out, Peace Corps volunteers were never seriously threatened since, according to Honoré, Dominicans were able to distinguish between American Peace Corps Volunteers and the American military.

Honoré remained in the Dominican Republic for another two and one half years, serving with the US Agency for International Development. He met his wife FLor during this assignment, and they were married in 1967. In 1968, they returned to the United States where he took a job working in Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty in Toledo. He was an urban community developer, organizing and helping residents of Toledo’s “Model Neighborhood,” a program that included the mostly black, poorest ten percent of the city. He served as assistant director of the Model Neighborhood Residents Association which helped residents communicate with city officials in planning and coordinating government funded community programs in health, housing, education, public transportation, and social services.

In 1971, Honoré decided to pursue his graduate degree at the University of Toledo College of Law where he was a graduate assistant while studying law. He graduated three years later in 1974. Hired as a law professor at Texan Southern University, an historically black university, he and his wife Flor moved to Houston. At Texas Southern, he encouraged law students to use their skills to promote civil rights and community development. He also taught contracts, commercial, international, human rights, and consumer law.

In 1978, on leave of absence from TSU, Honoré once again worked with the Peace Corps as Country Director in the Dominican Republic. By this time, Honoré and his wife had three small children, so this was a fortunate opportunity for the family to return to the Dominican Republic, Flor's home country, for three years. The children were able to learn Spanish and get to know their mother's family and culture. As Country Director, Honoré oversaw a group of about 150 Peace Corps volunteers and over a dozen staff members. Volunteers were engaged in projects with the Dominican government and private agencies involving agricultural extension and rural development, public health, organization and support of co-operatives, teacher training, and environmental education.

Honoré returned to Houston in 1981 to resume his law teaching career. In 1984, he decided to go into private practice, with an emphasis on immigration, international law, and personal injury law, which he did from 1984 to 2009. In 2005, he became a municipal judge in the Houston courts where he continues to serve on a part-time basis.

We all imagine as we graduate from high school and move on to college exactly what we will be doing after college. He fully intended to become a nuclear physicist and work for Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace initiative. He graduated from Capital University and went to The Ohio State University to work on a masters degree. Everything changed when John F. Kennedy announced his plans for the Peace Corp. At that point, his life went in a different direction, first to the Peace Corps and then to law school as a teacher and lawyer. He became interested in promoting civil rights and community development. During this process, he served his church and community on various boards and committees and published reviews concerning criminal law, employer discrimination, and the international aspects of criminal law.

Stephan Honoré has made his mark as a Peace Corps volunteer, a teacher, a lawyer, and, most of all, as a person of integrity, focused on service for those in need. Would he have made a good nuclear physicist? Undoubtedly, and very probably an excellent one, but the path he chose led him to a life of honor, dedication, and service.