

Volunteers Will Be Honored Feb. 14

Hundreds of area women received invitations this week to Metropolitan Detroit's first community-wide recognition ceremony honoring outstanding women volunteers. The event, scheduled for noon on Valentine's Day in Cobo Hall, will be staged by the newly formed Volunteer Award Council, comprised of representatives of 35 leading women's organizations working in cooperation with Women for the United Foundation (WUF). The award luncheon will be open to the public, and reservations may be made by telephoning the United Foundation, WO 5-1100.

Honored will be a group of women volunteers now being selected from nominations submitted by Wayne, Oakland and Macomb agencies and organizations as well as individuals. Principal speaker for the luncheon will be actress-author Cornelia Otis Skinner, star of stage and radio.

A panel of judges is now at work choosing the group of not more than 12 tri-county women volunteers who will symbolize the many thousands who give their time and talents for community betterment. Those selected will receive the council's first "Heart of Gold" awards signifying noteworthy service. A "Spirit of Detroit" charm will be attached to each gold heart award. Serving on the panel of judges are public officials, media representatives, educators, clergy and executives from business.

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Life in Vietnam, through the eyes of an American woman, can hold a clue to the United States government's bafflement there.

For the gap between Vietnamese and American cultures, says Mrs. Homer Higbee, is so wide that even while living there you can't be sure that what you are seeing is really happening.

"What we saw was through Western eyes," explained Peg Higbee, who is living in Farmington this year. "But what the Vietnamese saw, with their different cultural background,

may have been entirely different."

PEG AND HOMER HIGBEE lived in Vietnam with their three young children in the years between 1955 and 1957—just after the French pulled out.

Higbee, an administrator at Michigan State University, now on sabbatical doing graduate work at Wayne State University, was one of a team sent in by this country at the request of the Vietnam government to help train the local people to fill administrative jobs that had been done by the French.

"There was a great void to be filled," Mrs. Higbee said. "Suddenly there were very few teachers, doctors and nurses, postal workers, administrators. The Vietnamese had to learn to do these jobs."

SHE SAID THE FAMILY was in Vietnam when Ngo Dinh Diem was first elected president "and we felt we were living history." "Whatever he became later," Peg said of that official, "he started out as an impressive



Life In Vietnam Sometimes Puzzling For Americans

idealist—at least as we saw him."

But observing what went on in the country at large took second place for this visitor to the constant business of making a home in an utterly new environment. She's reporting on this for the Northwest YWCA Sampler Program at St. Malheur Church, Livonia, today.

She found that things like language, climate and servant problems filled her life with problems that never were more than partially resolved.

FOR INSTANCE, she and other American wives tried to learn Vietnamese. "It's a language based partly on tonality," Peg explained, "so the same sound varied in tone has an entirely different meaning."

"And after the day I thought I was visiting a high-born lady to be seated, and found I had actually told her to lie down like a dog, I decided to confine myself to a few sure phrases."

She also devoted part of her time to teaching English to the Vietnamese, "because those who know English had the chance at the better-paying jobs."

THE MATTERS of climate and servants worked together to change the Higbees' way of life slightly.

"I started out deciding nobody that I'd always done my own housework and I'd manage on my own in Vietnam," Peg said. "But it wasn't long before I realized I could not."

"For one thing, because of the heat, we had to change clothing three times a day and change and air the beds after each night. But the humidity was so high that the only way to get things dry was by ironing."

So the Higbees needed a domestic—as they are called in Vietnam—to help with the laundry.

THEN THE MATTER of feeding the family required complicated marketing.

"I tried and failed at the market place," Mrs. Higbee said. "The language problem was too great."

So the family hired a cook,

who is by tradition the shopper. But, of course, he could only be expected to buy the food in a morning at the market and then cook dinner. So they needed an assistant to cook breakfast and do the dishes.

Also needed were a general house domestic, and an amah for small Marjorie Jo, then less than three.

"And at that point we found out," said Peg, "that when you hire servants you take on responsibility for the problems of their entire families."

"You also have to expect that they will appropriate a certain amount of the food you buy—it isn't stealing or dishonesty to them, it's just part of the system. But you have to watch constantly, or they'll take ALL you buy. And you can't just turn the kitchen over to the cook. You have to check and make sure there is fuel, or he just won't prepare dinner."

PEG SAID SHE DECIDED to do the best she could about

the various problems and enjoy the total experience.

So she joined with other American wives in setting up a study and service group. These women tried to bring together as many different cultures as possible, and toward the end of the two years the Higbees spent in Vietnam even managed to bring in a few Vietnamese women.

The Americans assisted in some of the orphanage "where the children were the saddest ones I've ever seen," Peg said. "They had been affection-starved for so long they could hardly respond to love. But we played with them, and managed to raise money to buy them more milk and vital supplies."

The family has kept alive some of its Viet ties and feels a personal anguish over the strife there now. Peg put it this way:

"It was our whole life for two years, and we'll always feel that a bit of us is there."

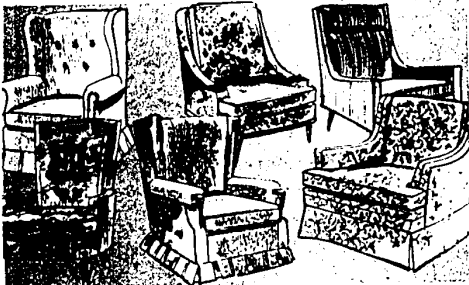


TELLS OF VIETNAM — In traditional Viet garb, Mrs. Homer Higbee pours tea in her Farmington apartment and recalls the two years her family spent in the troubled little country.

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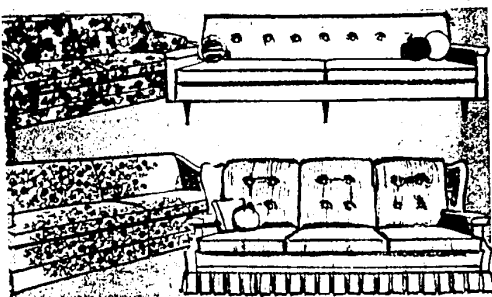


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