

11-17-2011

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Recommended Citation

Lubbers, Arend D., "Introduction of Jim and Donna Brooks, delivered for the 2011 Dutch American Leadership Award on November 17, 2011" (2011). *Presidential Speeches*. 289.
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Introduction of Jim and Donna Brooks
November 17, 2011
Arend D. Lubbers

No one deserves to receive an award on Dutch American Heritage Day unless they have the proper credentials. Jim Brooks' Dutch credentials are impeccable from his mother's side. Jim's grandfather was Otto VanderVelde, born in a sod hut in Kansas. His parents emigrated from Friesland and homesteaded with a few Dutch families in a remote part of that state. Otto came to Hope College in 1912, went on to medical school, returned to Holland to practice and never left.

His grandmother was a DenHerder from Zeeland whose family emigrated from Zeeland not long after VanRaalte established his colony. Those of us with roots here understand that being a DenHerder is as close to being a Dutch blueblood as you get in Western Michigan.

Donna Brooks is one of West Michigan's most admired persons. Working with her I have observed many of the qualities that make her so. I was perplexed when I discovered she had only Pennsylvania Dutch in her background. That hardly counts, but I was reassured when I learned she was born in Holland, Michigan. That blessing overcomes all obstacles. She has visited the motherland, doing research and buying 17th Century paintings. By now she is indistinguishable from true Dutch.

What have these remarkable people been doing in the last forty years besides owning, managing, and selling a highly successful bottling company, and raising a family? I'll tell you. They brought art to Western Michigan from the Golden Age of Dutch paintings, enriching our heritage with the best from the Netherlands. They have added contemporary Dutch art to the collections of the Holland Museum and Grand Valley State University. The Holland Arts

Council, the Settler's House Museum, Oxbow, the Cappon House, Hope College's DePree Art Center and gallery, and the Dutch Utopia exhibit at the Grand Rapids Art Museum, have felt the blessing of their benevolence.

I like to invoke our state's motto whenever I think it applies. *Si quaeris peninsulam amoenam, circumspice*. If you seek a brighter peninsula, look about you. Jim and Donna make our part of the peninsula much brighter. In our need to protect and enhance our natural and economic environment, behold they are there, establishing the West Michigan Strategic Alliance and the NewNorth Center of Design in Business. Making education better in our region, behold they are there, too; Donna serving as Board Chair at GVSU, Jim and Donna leading financial campaigns for the university and supporting the Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies. And then there are the children of Holland and the region who are better because of Jim's efforts and gifts. Goodness flows it seems undiminished and fortunately for us, uncontrollable, too.

I like the bumper sticker "you're not much if you're not Dutch". I agree with the concept, but, Jim and Donna, I think you are much because you are Dutch. You have a longstanding quality of Dutch Americans in Western Michigan; the desire to help, to give, to make life better. It is no surprise we are leaders in philanthropy in our nation.

Tonight you join distinguished Dutch Americans as you receive this award, Peter Cook, Dr. Elton Bruins, Max DePree, Dr. Bill Spoelhof, Dr. Gordon VanWylen, Congressman Peter Hoekstra, Senator Bill VanRegenmorter, and retired Dutch Consul Henk Witte, along with the cities of Holland and Zeeland and Heroes of the Dutch Resistance.

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the 2011 Dutch American Leadership Award recipients, Jim and Donna Brooks.