

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST TO AWARD AN HONORARY DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS DEGREE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

**Action Requested:** Consider approval of the request by the University of Northern Iowa to award an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Simon Estes at Spring 2015 or Fall 2015 Commencement.

**Executive Summary:** The University of Northern Iowa wishes to recognize Dr. Estes for his artistic achievements as an internationally renowned opera singer and for his advocacy for the health and education of children around the world.

**Details on Mr. Estes's Accomplishments:**

- ◇ Dr Estes was born in Centerville, Iowa in 1938 and graduated from the University of Iowa in 1963 with a degree in Music. He was the first African-American member of the university's Old Gold Singers. After graduation, he was awarded a full scholarship to study at the Julliard School of Music. In 1965, he made his professional operatic debut in Berlin with the Deutsche Oper singing the role of Ramfis in *Aida*.
- ◇ As the grandson of a slave and the son of a servant, Dr. Estes was raised in poverty; he overcame early years of prejudice to achieve international fame, helping to break down the barriers of racial discrimination in the world of opera.
- ◇ In 1966, Dr. Estes won the Bronze Medal in Moscow's Tchaikovsky Competition. He has performed at 84 of the major international opera companies, including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala Milan, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Paris Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, San Francisco Opera, Zurich Opera, the State Operas of Hamburg, Bavaria, and Vienna, among others.
- ◇ Dr. Estes's 1978 debut at the prestigious Bayreuth Festival in the title role of Richard Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* marked the first appearance there by an African-American male artist.
- ◇ Dr. Estes is dedicated to education, sharing his love and knowledge of music with students from elementary school through college. He has taught at the Julliard School of Music and given numerous master classes around the world. He started the Roots and Wings program to offer performance experience and scholarships for young artists (Wings), while celebrating his connection to Iowa as a native son (Roots). Currently, Dr. Estes is Distinguished Professor and Artist in Residence at Wartburg College and the F. Wendell Distinguished Artist in Residence at Iowa State University.
- ◇ As a result of his love and concern for children, Dr. Estes established four scholarship foundations in the United States, including the Iowa Counties Scholarship Program, which has allowed several students to attend the University of Northern Iowa and other schools. He also founded the Simon Estes International Foundation for Children whose goal is to assist in the health and education of needy children. Dr. Estes also founded the Simon Estes Music High School, a school for underprivileged children in Cape Town, South Africa.

- ◇ In 2012, Dr. Estes received the Gold Medal of Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, Spain. The award states, “in recognition of his brilliant artistic career and achievements worldwide with performances of the most significant operatic characters and innumerable recordings and countless performances of starring roles which were done with the utmost professionalism and artistic sensitivity.”
- ◇ In 2013, the Simon Estes Foundation inaugurated a program called Iowa Students Care to engage Iowa students in the cause of eliminating malaria in Africa and saving millions of lives by raising funds to provide treated bed net for African children.
- ◇ In January 2014, Governor Terry Branstad presented Dr. Estes the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award which “recognizes individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to Dr. King’s vision, helping others, cultural awareness, active community participation, and promoting racial equality of all people in Iowa.”
- ◇ The University of Northern Iowa wishes to recognize Dr. Estes for his extraordinary accomplishments with an honorary degree.