

President's Award Recipients Announced



Sanan Angubolkul



Martha Verdejo Bigliani

The four recipients of the third annual President's Award have been announced by President and CEO of AFS Intercultural Programs Francisco "Tachi" Cazal: Sanan Angubolkul (Thailand to USA 1965-1966); Martha Verdejo Bigliani (Argentina to USA 1955-1956); Karin Friedenheit Eisele; and Marianne Meyer-Ott (Switzerland to USA 1969-1970). "We are delighted to honor these very special individuals who have shown their extraordinary commitment to AFS year after year through their unfaltering dedication to the mission and values of the AFS Network," said Francisco Cazal. "Their work is an inspiration to all of us who hold AFS close to our hearts."

The President's Award was created to honor AFS Returnees, volunteers, staff members, and supporters who have contributed substantially and over a period of time to AFS through their commitment to the program and its goals.

The Awardees

Since 1988, **Sanan Angubolkul** has been a devoted AFS volunteer, despite his extensive professional activities. As the chairman of AFS Intercultural Programs Thailand, and under his leadership, AFS Thailand has provided the AFS Network with programs that are distinguished by their quality and innovation. Mr. Angubolkul said, "Being a part of AFS has changed my life by helping me to develop confidence, to cultivate a well-rounded perspective, and to become a global citizen. The

values of caring and sharing, so integral to the unprecedented success of AFS, have become an integral part of my life as well."

He spent his AFS year, 1965-1966, in Maitland, Florida, and attended Winter Park High School. He later studied at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Georgia, where he earned a degree in business administration. He has received several honorary degrees: two doctorates from Sripatum University and Chiangmai University, and a PhD in business administration (management) from the Rajamangala University of Technology. He is the chairman and president of Srithai Superware Public Co., Ltd. and its fifteen subsidiaries and affiliates—the world's market leader in the plastics and melamine industry. He is married to Natthika W. Angubolkul and they are the parents of four children: Garun and Piyaporn (both AFS Returnees), Nitinund (a 2011 AFS student), and Chamaiporn.

Martha Verdejo Bigliani was in the first group of five AFS students from Argentina. She remembered, "At that time I had no idea what the American Field Service was. On August 6th, 1955, I arrived in New York, and was told that I was going to be interviewed by Mrs. (Dot) Field. So, that seemed to be the answer, this Mrs. Field, was probably the owner of American Field Service." At the end of her year with AFS, Mr. Galatti asked her to start the AFS program in Argentina. With a group of friends, she arranged hosting for 32 American students the next summer and became the national director of AFS Argentina in 1958.

She said, "I have to admit that all I did was improvise. I knew that we had to send students and receive them, but we were only a small group. From then on, AFS started growing and growing." Her creation of a volunteer structure throughout the country and her extraordinary ability to ensure program growth laid the groundwork to make Argentina a leader in the AFS Network. In 1983, she became the director of Youth for Understanding in Argentina and managed their programs in three countries. Today, with 21 participating countries, she serves as a member of their 14 person International Advisory Council representing different parts of the world.

She is the mother of three children, Andrea, Fernando, and Mariano. She remarked, "AFS changed my life; there is no question about it. Before AFS, a map was just a map. After AFS, most countries on the map had friendly faces that I could relate to. Country borders do not exist anymore for me."

Karin Friedenheit Eisele joined the AFS staff in 1959, where her first assignment was to chaperone 900 AFS students returning home by boat. Throughout her 20 year career at AFS, she helped create a strong and vibrant hosting and sending program. Her expertise in dealing with volunteers and her ability as an effective fundraiser laid the groundwork for her future career in promoting international learning and leadership. She said, "I realize now what an absolute privilege it was to work at AFS, whose mission fully engaged my passion, my intellect,



Karin Friedenheit Eisele

and my energy. How lucky we were to help launch the powerful movement that AFS has become around the globe, a movement in celebration of our common humanity and the urgency of our shared concerns."

After having held executive positions in New York City with Project Orbis and Coro, she worked as a consultant until 1998 when she became the West Coast director of the Institute of International Education (IIE) in San Francisco. IIE administers programs including the Fulbright Scholarships in the United States. Her focus on providing leadership and training opportunities to underserved groups has increased women's effectiveness as leaders in the public and private sectors. She has served on many boards, including AFS-USA, the Smith College Club, the Executive Service Corps of the San Francisco Bay Area, and Enterprise for High School Students in San Francisco. She and her husband Paul have three daughters: Lauren, Gretchen, and Rebecca, two of whom participated in AFS programs abroad.

Marianne Meyer-Ott was an AFS student in Berkeley, California, and attended Berkeley High School in 1969-1970, where she witnessed the social unrest that was rocking the area at the time. From 1991 to 1997, Marianne served on many committees as a trustee of AFS International during this period of rapid transformation. "Change, but remember tradition" could be said to be Marianne's motto. She has been a moving force in reminding AFS to keep sight of its past and its values while looking to the future. She



Marianne Meyer-Ott

wrote, "Berkeley changed the world—AFS changed my world. My year in Berkeley shaped me for the rest of my life. It always encompassed what AFS was to me, and I am grateful and feel privileged that AFS placed me with my host family and in Berkeley of all places."

She has been a committed AFS volunteer, with AFS in Geneva, the AFS national office in Zurich, and as national chairperson of AFS Switzerland. She is a founding member of the AFS Foundation. The Foundation's most important responsibility is to secure the existence and the continuity of the AFS Network. The AFS Foundation:

- assists AFS International and its affiliates worldwide in promoting intercultural exchanges
- endeavors to preserve the legacy of AFS and the American Field Service
- holds the AFS name and logo and related intellectual property and licenses

Marianne is currently an independent manager and troubleshooter, and serves as president of the board of Spitex Thalwil, a nonprofit association for home health care. She and her husband Kurt have two children, a daughter, Barbara, an AFS Returnee to Finland, and a son, Stephan.

This year, the awards will be presented on Friday, November 19th at a luncheon at the former AFS Headquarters at 313 East 43rd Street, courtesy of His Excellency Hamidon Ali, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations and AFS student from Malaysia to the U.S. in 1967-1968. It is hoped that many friends and supporters of AFS will gather to celebrate the honorees and their achievements, renew friendships, and reconnect with the organization.

For more information on this very special occasion, please contact Jackie Cannon Brown at AFS Intercultural Programs, tel: 212-807-8686, ext. 1927 or email: Jackie.Brown@afs.org.