

NEA honors Littleton couple with civil rights award

Every human being has milestones. Adults often think of them as the major events of life: the birth of a child, a first job, marriage, the death of a loved one.

Children's milestones seem much simpler: a birthday party, making a friend, putting on glasses for the first time, having a pet. These happenings, along with others that inspire all children worldwide, form the core of a collection of appealing pictures and writings thoughtfully assembled by Richard and Michele Steckel, a husband and wife team who believe that images of and thoughts about such commonalities of childhood can and should be the basis of understanding across cultures and continents.

For delivering the message that the commonalities of childhood can be a starting point for understanding and tolerance, Michele and Richard Steckel will receive the NEA Author-Illustrator Human and Civil Rights Award this summer.

The honor is presented by NEA to those whose graphic and literary creations help students understand the significance of human and civil rights in everyday life. The Steckels will receive the award July 2 at NEA's 42nd Annual Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner in Washington, DC.

Called simply The Milestones Project, the Steckel's book of photos, children's comments, and memories of childhood milestones can be enjoyed by young children as a picture book and by adults as a reminder of what it is to be a child.

The book enables children and their families to see similarities across the globe. Although it also focuses on unique aspects of world cultures, it wisely deemphasizes the contrasts that lead to misunderstandings and often to hostilities.

Since 1998, when they originated the concept of a photographic project that would celebrate children's milestones as a way toward global understanding, the Steckels' work has

taken them from an initial photo shoot in Ecuador, to Africa, Europe, Asia, the Pacific Islands, back to South America, Central America, all over the U.S., and to too many other places to name here. They have shot and processed their photos, exhibited their work, received awards, established a Milestones Peace Prize for Children, and published workbooks in English and Spanish for learners in Head Start programs.

The Steckels' vision and their realization of it have garnered wide recognition exemplified by the Global Tolerance Award from the Friends of the United Nations in 2003, and, in 2005, the Ambassador of Peace Award from the Conflict Center in Denver. Also in 2005, The Milestones Project received the Notable Book Award from the Children's Book Council and the National Council for the Social Studies.

Both Steckels have had considerable experience with children over their more than 40-year marriage. As Executive Director of the Denver Children's Museum from 1976 to 1984, Dr. Richard Steckel initiated programs that made the museum a national model of the earned income approach to fundraising, while his wife Michele ran the award-winning gift

shop of the museum during the years of his directorship. She also taught children with special needs in Littleton. She considers one of her most important roles, however, "managing the unmanageable" of raising three "rambunctious" daughters.

A graduate of Boston University, Dr. Steckel has brought to the Milestones Project international experience as a corporate business director, author of business books, consultant,



Michele and Richard Steckel

and teacher. He has guest taught at the University of Auckland, the University of Maryland, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

On those rare occasions when they are not in some far country adding to the Milestones Project, the Steckels live in Littleton.

Read more about the Steckels and their work at milestonesproject.com. ■