



Swedish Council of America

How the SCA uses the four pillars to preserve Swedish American culture

By John Bechtel
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How to fund an umbrella organization

In the early days, there were no individual SCA membership dues, and the members anyway were not individuals so much as organizations and companies. Individual Swedish Americans' contribution to legacy financial and intellectual wealth in North America has been substantial over many decades. Curtis Carlson, the founder of the Carlson companies (think Radisson Hotels); Russell Peterson, the President of National Audubon Society and governor of Delaware; J. Erik Jonsson, the founder and president of Texas Instruments and Mayor of Dallas, Texas, from 1964 to 1971; Franklin Forsberg, magazine publisher including Popular Mechanics; John W. Nordstrom, co-founder of the Nordstrom department store chain; Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist; Duane Kullberg, CEO of Arthur Anderson (one-time Big-8 accounting firm), all come to mind, and many, many more.

Curt Carlson in particular was very proud of his Swedish heritage and through his business connections (Radisson and SAS jointly owned a major chain of hotels in Norden), brought several Swedish business leaders from the Wallenberg group (Investor AB) into the SCA fold. These wealthy business people became known as the *Royal Round Table* of the SCA membership. In the early years of SCA, the members of the Royal Round Table effectively comprised a Who's Who of Swedish America.

SCA semi-annual board meetings were regularly held in



Curtis Carlson, founder of Carlson companies (Radisson Hotels, etc.)



Russell W. Peterson, president of National Audubon Society, and Gov. of Delaware from 1969-1973.



J. Erik Jonsson, founder and president of Texas Instruments and Mayor of Dallas, Texas, from 1964-1971.



William Rehnquist
U.S. Supreme Court Justice



Duane Kullberg,
CEO of Arthur Anderson, 1980-1989

both the USA and Sweden and were quite the social affairs. These were people who were justifiably proud of their achievements and grateful for the freedom and markets that made their growth possible. Many of them had come from a very stratified and limiting Swedish society and blossomed into their full potential after they arrived in North America.

Sharing their wealth for philanthropic and cultural causes, these early donors created a Swedish Heritage Foundation, a permanent endowment to fund cultural projects. In the same decade of the 1990s they created two different scholarships, one to bring Swedish students to America, and the other to bring American students to Sweden. They also began the publication of the now-defunct magazine *Sweden & America*.



SCA Executive Director Gregg White congratulates 2015 SCA Glenn T. Seaborg Science Scholar Abdul-Rahman Merhi, an Augustana College senior at the time. The college is located in Rock Island, Illinois.

Then the world changed

And so did SCA. Executive Director Gregg White shares his observations with us:

- The original SCA was a direct-service operation, doing work to support local Affiliate Member organizations. It was funded by a small and shrinking group of dedicated, generous business people. When money was needed, someone starting calling their friends. For the first 30 or 35 years most of the money was provided by SCAs major donor club, the above referenced Royal Round Table.

The new generations that took over business leadership from the retiring members of the Royal Round Table had less connection with traditional Sweden, leading to the demise of the Royal Round Table. Fundraising is now a community-wide effort, and requires a more formalized, consistent, professional effort to achieve SCA's mission.

- Globalization and corporate consolidation led to fewer and

fewer businesses having a Swedish identity. This was forcefully brought to our attention recently when this magazine was unable to get a response to our repeated requests to both the North American and the international Volvo organization for an answer to the question, "Is the Volvo still Swedish?"

- The younger generations had less focus on their Swedish heritage, resulting in the number of Swedish-American organizations shrinking from over 1,200 to under 300.

- While generally speaking, the younger generations had less connection with their Swedish heritage and traditional Sweden, they often had strong interest in contemporary Sweden, Swedish entrepreneurship and Swedish creativity, regardless of their own family heritage.

- Staff at SCA has become very lean. In the first decade of this 21st century, SCA typically had three full-time workers, one whose sole job was to coordinate and provide services to Affiliate members. The Internet made many of these services unnecessary. Today SCA only has two paid employees, Gregg White as Executive Director (see inset article) and Brian Kays, an intern who works only eight hours a week. The committee members work very diligently within the scope of their respective responsibilities, but they do not assist with the day-to-day affairs of the organization. The Board of Directors is also very active.

- *Sweden & America* magazine has been replaced by *SCA Today*

SCA as a community foundation for Swedish America

From the very beginning, SCA has been a membership organization, with membership open to any and all organizations involved with presenting, preserving and promoting Swedish heritage in North America. However, technically speaking, individual donors

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are referred to as “supporters” while only organizations become “members”.

There are currently 150 Affiliate Member organizations. Dues are based on how many individuals are in the group applying, from \$75/year to \$500/year for groups over 2,000. Membership dues support SCA's operating and administrative costs preserving Swedish heritage and promoting ties with contemporary Sweden.

For legal purposes, SCA is actually two organizations working in tandem (the Council for services to the community and the Foundation to oversee the endowment) but the distinction is moot to the public. **The Foundation contracts with SCA for all its administrative needs, so it has no staff and only one committee, the Board of Trustees.**

The American Swedish Institute (ASI) was a founding member of Swedish Council of America (SCA). Over the years, SCA through its Foundation occasionally provided ASI with grants, but there is no formal relationship between the two groups. However, for perhaps the first 35 years of its existence, the ASI was the landlord for the SCA offices.

The Four Pillars

1. SCA SCHOLARSHIPS to young people

Since 1992, the SCA Curtis L. Carlson Swedish-American Scholarship has been providing financial support for outstanding Swedish students from either of Sweden's premier and ancient universities, **Uppsala** (1477) and **Lund** (1666), to study at **Gustavus Adolphus College** in Saint Peter, Minnesota.

Named after Nobel Chemistry Prize Laureate, former SCA Board Chair and former Chair of the US Atomic Energy Commission, the SCA **Glenn T. Seaborg Science Scholarship** connects American natural science students with the most prestigious scientific recognition in the world—the Nobel Prize. The best way to promote Sweden with young people is to let them experience it for themselves, as happened to Sarah Lucht (See the article “How the Swedish Council of America Strengthens Cultural Connections—The Sarah Lucht Story”).



PHOTO: N OHA

Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden



PHOTO: BESTOFOPENHAGEN.COM

Lund University, Lund, Sweden

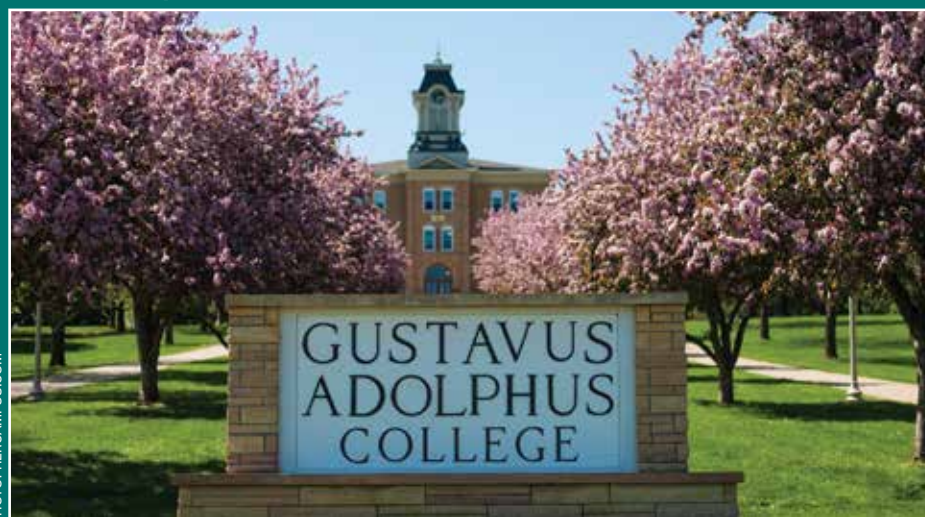


PHOTO: HERCAMPUS.COM

Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, USA

One of the four pillars, The SCA Curtis L. Carlson Swedish-American Scholarship connects students from the USA and Sweden by bringing outstanding students from either of the above universities to Gustavus Adolphus College, a private, four-year, coeducational liberal arts college, founded by Swedish Americans in 1862. The college is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In 2013, SCA launched the SCA Humanities Scholarship and the SCA Swedish Language Scholarship, to be followed by three more:

- Economics or Entrepreneurialism
- Peace and Conflict Resolution
- Medicine or Public Health

Once funded, these six scholarships will mirror those of the six Nobel prizes.

2. SCA GRANTS to organizations

Between 1975 and 2018, Swedish Council of America has proudly made 403 grants to 180 organizations in 35 countries. By 2017, the total had exceeded one million dollars. The recipients included museums, schools, language camps, art galleries, archives, theaters, libraries, musical groups, lodges, festivals, language camps, genealogical societies and dozens of other organizations, all with an eye to preserving Swedish heritage or promoting Swedish culture to an ever-wider audience.

3. The AWARDS AND RECOGNITION program

Recognition of hard work and leadership, both locally and internationally, is an important way to strengthen cultural ties, particularly when awarded for cross-cultural endeavors. SCA connects the Swedish diaspora with four awards twice each year.

4. SCA CONNECTING OTHERS

At events SCA's semi-annual meetings usually take place over a weekend when an SCA Affiliate Member organization is holding a major event or fundraiser. Great time and place to network!

Facebook: There are currently 4,000 Likes on SCA's page Swedish.Council. If you are reading this, even if you are not Swedish American, it would be a gesture of goodwill to go to their page and click on Like.

SCA Today: quarterly magazine to inform members, supporters and constituents about the projects SCA funds, the scholars it supports, the leaders it recognizes, the opportunities it presents and the people involved in an informative and interesting manner. It is the replacement for Sweden & America magazine.

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Each year, the SCA Glenn T. Seaborg Science Scholarship sends students to the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony in Stockholm, Sweden.

By 2017, SCA grants exceeded one million dollars. Recipients included musical groups, awards and recognition programs, heritage festivals, language camps, schools, museums, art galleries, lodges and more, with the purpose of preserving Swedish heritage or promoting Swedish culture to an ever-wider audience.

PHOTOS: SWEDISH COUNCIL OF AMERICA

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SCA Update Electronic newsletter about how to apply for a grant, when to nominate someone for leadership, notice of upcoming events, and calls-to-action.

What is the future of cultural, ethnic, or national heritage?

Everywhere cultural heritage organizations, those entities dedicated to the preservation of ethnic or national heritage have been on the defensive. Younger generations do not show the same enthusiasm for the traditions of the past, and are far more absorbed in their present or near future.

For you, what does it mean to be Swedish American? Or Scandinavian-American? Or Nordic-American? What would be lost if future generations forgot or ceased to care where they came from? What do we want our children and grandchildren to remember, and why?

In the age of DNA testing, we are learning that we have far more diversity in our DNA than we might have guessed. Few of us are 100% of anything.

The Swedish Council of America has a deceptively simple answer to the question raised here. Encourage our young people to travel and find the answer for themselves, just as those before us did. This is why SCA is focusing on making it easier for our best and brightest (tomorrow's influencers) to engage with other cultures, beginning with those places our forebears once called home. In the end, the search for identity and meaning is an intensely personal odyssey.



David Baker, 2017 Chair of the SCA Awards and Recognition Committee, preparing to bestow awards in Philadelphia. Four awards are given each year—three honoring outstanding contributions to Swedish-America and the world by famous and not-so-famous individuals, and one which recognizes milestones and special achievements by organizations and public figures in our community. *The SCA Great Achievement Award* is the highest level of recognition given, intended for leaders (authors, journalists, teachers, academics, statesmen and others) who have made outstanding contributions in promoting strong relationships between the USA, Canada and Sweden and/or for a lifetime of dedication to furthering understanding and appreciation of Swedish heritage and culture in North America. The other three prestigious awards are the SCA Award of Merit, SCA Proclamations recognition, and the SCA Founders Award.

An Interview with Gregg White, Executive Director of Swedish Council of America (SCA)

■ SP: Hi Gregg, and thanks for sharing your story with us. Since your name doesn't sound particularly Swedish, we are a little curious about your Swedish connection. Did you grow up in a Swedish family?

No. My Swedish story began as an American exchange student in Huskvarna, Småland, arranged by Rotary International for the 1969-1970 school year. The Vietnam War was raging (Sweden was strongly against it), the Soviet Union had recently invaded Czechoslovakia, and Cold War tensions were intense. I was 17 years old. I knew no Swedish and relatively little about Sweden upon arrival, and my instructions were to be a goodwill ambassador.

■ SP: When and where did you learn Swedish?

Luckily for me, I had wonderful host families, one of which I especially bonded with and I remain very close to my Swedish siblings to this day. Like many other exchange students, at the end of that first year I was dissatisfied with my Swedish but in love with the country, so I studied two years of Swedish at the U of M and then returned for a year at Uppsala Universitet. That second year really honed my Swedish language skills and cemented my relationship with the country.

■ SP: When, and in what capacity did you begin your career with American/Swedish institutions?

I began as a teacher at the American Swedish Institute (ASI) in the fall of 1974. Classes for students ages 8 -14 were held Saturday morning, and no real text book was used, so it was all just pictures, words and songs. This went on for a couple of years before I moved on to teaching adults. The book then was Svenska för Er, one of the first SFI books that I was ever aware of. I used huge stacks of overhead projector transparencies for both classes.



PHOTO: SWEDISH COUNCIL OF AMERICA
Gregg White, Executive Director, SCA

■ SP: Do you have a style or philosophy of teaching?

Complete immersion is the best teaching method around but is impossible outside of Sweden, so I focus on building a foundation of grammar and vocabulary so that when one arrives in Sweden, it is easy to pick up conversation skills by speaking with Swedes. Also, I firmly believe the axiom, "You can't understand the language until you understand the culture; and you can't understand the culture until you understand the language", so I include much about Swedish culture in class.

■ SP: How long did you continue in this teaching function?

I am still teaching Swedish Language and Culture for the American Swedish Institute (ASI), now well over 40 years. I teach language classes and cultural courses such as Swedish Crime Fiction on TV.

■ SP: How do you teach language and culture for the American Swedish Institute (ASI) and be the Executive Director of the Swedish Council of America (SCA) at the same time?

My full-time "day job" is Executive Director at SCA. In addition, and totally unrelated to SCA, as my "night job", I teach Swedish part-time at the American Swedish Institute (ASI).
SP: You are justifiably proud of the grants and scholarships that SCA makes available each year to organizations and students. What can you share with us about the selection process for awardees?

"To have a long-term positive impact on a young person's life might be the most rewarding experience an adult can have..."

— Gregg White

The selection processes for SCA Grants and SCA Scholarships are thorough and professional. There are current and retired professors, business people and community leaders on each committee and they take their roles very seriously.

The members of the SCA Grants Committee carefully review each application, weigh the potential impact on the greatest number of people, and judiciously allot the amounts granted. Nearly every application is worthy of support but the sum of the amounts requested far outreaches our capacity. Our Strategic Priorities call for SCA to have at least \$100,000 available annually for SCA Grants. Just imagine the impact that would have!

Because of our unique method for selecting SCA Scholars, only the crème de la crème of students receive SCA Scholarships. There is no application process. Instead, each eligible school may nominate only one student per scholarship per year. This means that either the university president or department head chooses the one student they think might succeed in being selected for the award. Then these top students are in competition with each other as the committee selects the scholarship recipients. This results in incredible awardees.

■ SP: Gregg, how would you summarize what SCA is all about, and how you feel about your own participation in its activities?

In recent years, SCA has revised its governing structure, with the board becoming more involved, active and engaged. The creation of a 509(a)(3) supporting organization to house and oversee the endowment allows the SCA board to focus in achieving the organization's mission and increasing impact on Swedish America.

With increased focus on scholarships, SCA is encouraging more

young people to experience Sweden for themselves. Unquestionably, the favorite part of my job is to meet with SCA Scholars and hear their excitement as their world is expanded, both academically and culturally.

■ SP: How does the Swedish word lagom speak to your career and interests?

Lagom is the Goldilocks word of Swedish – not too hot and not too cold. It also means not too great, powerful or special nor too meek, weak or ordinary. In other words, just right.

Being of Swedish temperament and a fan of lagom, I don't talk much about myself. You saw how I became involved in Sweden on the ASI site. You know that in addition to SCA I work at ASI. I feel equally at home with my Swedish siblings in Stockholm as I do with my American siblings in Minneapolis.

My weekend hobby is to hike in any of Minnesota's state parks, where often I am accompanied by one or more of my mentees. It is my goal to spend at least one day experiencing each of these parks and appreciate even more the beauty of this state. I think I am up to about 27 of the 75 parks and recreation areas in the state.

I hope this is enough. There is not much more to say.



PHOTO: SWEDISH COUNCIL OF AMERICA
Gregg White presents Pequot Lakes, Minnesota graduate Karl Satterlund with his award recently, which helped him study in Sweden for a semester.

Scandinavian Press wishes to express its thanks to Gregg White for his assistance with the preparation of these articles about the history and activities of the Swedish Council of America. It is amazing what he and others have been able to accomplish with limited staff, tight budgets, and dedicated volunteers over many decades.