



AMBASSADOR DAWN LIBERI CLASS OF 1972

"From the moment I stepped through the gates into the courtyard and set eyes on the gracious campus with the beautiful fountain, I knew Fontbonne was the high school for me", explains retired U.S. Ambassador to Burundi, Dawn Liberi. "I was also drawn to Fontbonne because of its record of academic excellence, dedicated faculty and staff, and outstanding placement of graduates into noted colleges and universities. However, the campus and stunning view of the Verrazano Narrows were a welcome added bonus!" "Eager to engage in all that Fontbonne had to offer, I threw myself into the academic curriculum, while also engaging in extracurricular activities and forming lifelong friendships – which I maintain to this day. One of the lasting foundations I built was training in public speaking, as a direct result of participating in Fontbonne's Speech and Debate Team, including competing with other teams. The formative training instilled in me to cogently form thoughts and articulate them publicly, cannot be overstated. It is a skill that has served me throughout my career in public service."

Ambassador Liberi explains that she felt extremely fortunate to have a family that valued and supported learning experiences outside the classroom and attributed her maternal grandfather, originally from the Philippines and fluent in several languages, with influencing her to seek opportunities to study abroad.



The summer between junior and senior year, she was given a scholarship to participate in a life changing experience. Sponsored by Harvard, the program enabled 14 college and graduate students (she was the only one still in high school) to travel and study in Mexico, Japan, Thailand, India, Nepal, Ethiopia, and Norway. The students lived with families in most countries and studied with renowned academics like Dr. Norman Borlaug who had just won the Nobel Prize for the Green Revolution in Agriculture, and Ivan Illich, who had just written a landmark study in education "De-Schooling Society." Grateful for this extraordinary opportunity, she returned to Fontbonne and presented a slide show of her experiences to the entire student body, as well as other schools and Girl Scout groups in the city.

This experience prompted her to apply to Hampshire College, newly established in 1970 as an "experiment in higher education" in which students designed their educational program with an academic committee, and where an emphasis was placed on experiential learning. "Though there were no grades or majors, it was the most challenging academic experience of my life. The hardest thing is to set standards and then compete with yourself to achieve them", she explained. This is where the lessons learned at Fontbonne; to focus and establish disciplined study habits, enabled her to succeed in this environment. "I focused on pre-Med studies but shifted over to international public health. I think I was influenced by my studying the health care systems while living in Egypt and the Netherlands, as well as my internship at UNICEF," explains Dawn. After an early graduation, she spent six months working at World Health Organization in Geneva, before attending the School of Public Health at U/C Berkeley for a Master's Degree.

Here again, the program at Berkeley emphasized academic excellence and experiential learning. To complete her thesis and satisfy the applied portion of the program, Dawn engaged in a year-long fellowship at the Office of International Health (Department of Health and Human Services) in Washington, D.C., where she studied the health care system of Burma and spent several months living in Zanzibar and working on a malaria eradication program. Through her work she was introduced to the U.S. Agency for International Development – USAID – the U.S. Government's foreign assistance program in development, where she began her career as a Foreign Service Officer. Through her work as a Health Development Officer, Dawn spent six years in Senegal and Niger, was selected for a Master's level program in Foreign Policy and National Security, and eventually returned overseas heading programs in Africa which included work which reduced the HIV/AIDS epidemic to 5% of the population. This success led to the establishment of the U.S. Presidential Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS (PEPFAR) - the largest worldwide program combatting HIV/AIDS. In 2005, Dawn was asked by the head of USAID to serve as the Mission Director in Iraq. This would bring her into the war zone to head the largest nation building project since the Marshall Plan after WWII. A year later, she served as the USAID Development Counselor to the Commander of the U.S. Central Command and was a senior advisor to the likes of Admiral William Fallon, General Dempsey, and Gen.

## Alumna of the Month April 2018

Petraeus. From 2009-11, Ms. Liberi headed up the office at the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan where she worked with experts involved in governance and economic development. She also served at the U.S. Embassy in Libya and worked alongside Ambassador Christopher Stevens who died only one month after she left that post.



In 2012, President Barack Obama nominated Ms. Liberi as the U.S. Ambassador to Burundi where she served for four years and where she helped the country's citizens through political and social strife. She eventually had to evacuate American families and personnel because of civil unrest and insecurity when it was announced that Burundi's



president would run for a third term. With a reduced staff, she assisted a number of human-rights activists whose lives had been threatened. When her tour as ambassador ended in 2016, she decided to retire from her 30-year career in public service.

"I also had the opportunity to interact with

extraordinary women leaders who served as an inspiration to me, including Hillary Clinton – first in her role as First Lady, than as Secretary of State. In addition to being exceptionally smart and articulate, she was always gracious and personable towards me. Another role model has been Dr. Jane Goodall, who I worked with in Uganda to establish a sanctuary for orphaned chimpanzees on an island in Lake Victoria. I was fortunate to host Jane several times in Burundi and visit her famous chimpanzee research station in Gombe, Tanzania."

"I loved my career as it afforded me extraordinary experiences and I met the most amazing people. From children in small villages to leaders on the world stage, it is the human spirit that connects us all."