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Lenoir Ekdahl has been director of food services for student housing at the University of Kansas since 1955. She was inducted last night into the KU Women's Hall of Fame.

Food service job not just catering

Work brings KU director fame

By JOSEPH REBELLO
Staff writer

When Lenoir Ekdahl arrived at the University of Kansas in 1955, she was given a small desk in the kitchen of Gertrude Sellards Pearson Hall and told to direct food services for the hall and several others that were going to be built.

The prospect didn't thrill her. She promised herself she would stay on the job three years and then look for a job in Topeka, where her husband was working.

It didn't quite work out that way. Instead, Ekdahl built up the housing office's food services department from an operation that looked after the needs of fewer than 500 students to one that now caters to 4,700 students.

Last night, she finally stepped up to take credit for that accomplishment. At a program organized by the Emily Taylor Women's Resource Center, Ekdahl became one of four KU staff and faculty members to be inducted into the 1987 KU Women's Hall of Fame.

Ekdahl was cited for professional competence and service to the University.

Earlier this week, Ekdahl reminisced about her early years at the University.

She found her job too exciting to leave when residence halls began to be built in quick succession soon after her arrival.

"Those were exciting times," Ekdahl said. "We'd have one residence hall opened, and before anything else could happen, there'd be another on the drawing board."

"Finally, I never moved. I just liked the job here."

But it was never easy, she said. When she started in September 1955, she had a difficult time hiring workers at the rate of 75 cents an hour, then the hourly full-time wage, she said. Student workers

were paid 35 cents an hour. Ekdahl herself made only \$3,600 a year.

"We didn't have health insurance or anything. But I was young and eager, and I thought we could make it," she said. "And we did."

"When I first got here they had a set menu. There was no selection. You'd have one meat dish, one vegetable dish and one salad. And you had to eat it or go somewhere else."

Ekdahl changed that. Today, hall residents have a choice of at least two main dishes, in addition to salads, desserts and pop, she said.

That has not stopped students from grumbling about the food, she said, but complaints about food are something she has become used to.

"You've got 4,000 students together, and they have food habits that they developed long before they began to live in a 14,000 hall. We try to hit them with something that's middle-of-the-road, something that would satisfy the most number of students. But we're never going to be able to cook like mother does."

Some of Ekdahl's colleagues said she directed the food services department with a combination of toughness and compassion.

"She's done just about everything," said Ken Stoner, director of student housing and one of three people who nominated Ekdahl for the honor. "She's kept the price of meals very low and the quality high. She made my job a lot easier when I came here."

Catherine Cox, an administrative assistant at the housing office who has worked with Ekdahl for 23 years, said, "She's always very cordial and low-key with people who come to the office."

Commission honors 4 women

By LAURA BOSTROM
Staff writer

Rampant rumors on the KU campus in the early 1970s caused then-graduate student Rae Sedgwick to ask for a rumor control office. Emily Taylor, dean of women, said "use my office" and the KU information center began.

Sedgwick was one of four women inducted last night into the KU Women's Hall of Fame, a part of the Women's Recognition Program sponsored by the KU Commission on the Status of Women. About 150 people attended the program in Alderson Auditorium of the Kansas Union.

Lenoir Ekdahl, director of food

services for student housing; Kathleen McCluskey-Fawcett, associate professor of psychology and chairman of the department of psychology; and Joanne M. Collins, assistant vice president of United Missouri Bank, also were honored.

Fifteen years ago, more than 20 women, calling themselves the February Sisters, locked themselves in a KU building and demanded rights and services for women. Sedgwick was one of those women.

Sedgwick has received advanced degrees in nursing, psychology and a juris doctorate from the KU law school. She now is serving her second four-year term

on the Bonner Springs City Council.

But Sedgwick said a children's book, "The White Frame House," was her greatest accomplishment. Her goals now include more writing, particularly a book on women and their daughters.

Several of McCluskey-Fawcett's students attended the program in support of their teacher.

"The letters my students wrote meant more than the award," McCluskey-Fawcett said. When she was a student 13 years ago, she said, she nominated Frances Horowitz, now vice chancellor for research, graduate studies and public service, to the Hall of Fame.