

ASG SEWING HALL OF FAME

MEET: KERSTIN MARTENSSON 2006 Sewing Hall of Fame Honoree



At ASG Conference 2006, Kerstin Martensson was inducted posthumously into the Sewing Hall of Fame. Anyone who has ever sewed with a Kwik-Sew pattern or used the information in a Kwik-Sew publication has been touched by Kerstin's legacy.

Born in Gothenburg, Sweden and educated in Sweden and England, Kerstin specialized in clothing construction, pattern design, and fashion. She used these skills in the ready-to-wear industry where quick-and-easy patterns were needed to reduce labor and time for clothing manufacturers. Ultimately, she took a job as a pattern maker with Swedish-based Viking Sewing Machine Company. In the mid '60s, that position evolved into one as the company's representative, traveling internationally. She was the first foreign representative to be sent to the United States by any sewing machine company. She was a woman breaking new ground in the sewing industry—with a position so unique that she received a great deal of press coverage.

About the same time, leading sewing machine companies were developing "reverse cycle machines"—the original name for machines with stretch-stitch capability. Viking's revolutionary new machine didn't sell well in America because people didn't know what to do with those

"new" stitches. To remedy the problem, Kerstin was called on to design "demonstration" patterns. Drawing on her manufacturing experience, she developed four sweater patterns that utilized the fast and easy sewing techniques of ready-to-wear. It wasn't long before both the patterns and the machines were a hit and home sewers wanted more.

Producing more patterns while still commuting between Sweden and the U.S. began to take its toll, and Kerstin decided to strike out on her own. She relocated to the U.S. and opened her own business.

In 1967, Kerstin formed the Sew Knit & Stretch Company in Minneapolis, Minn. and published her first book, "How to Sew Knit and Stretch Fabric," the following year. She met Robert McMaster, a fellow Swede and independent distributor with U.S. distribution rights for Viking. They married and Kerstin continued to grow her business, writing books and creating patterns.

In 1974, Kerstin changed the name of her company to Kwik-Sew Pattern Company. She discontinued importing fabrics and concentrated on writing sewing instruction books and broadening her pattern line.

On a return visit to Sweden in 1977, her husband was knighted by the king of Sweden for the economic growth he brought to that country by importing Viking sewing machines to the U.S. A few years later, Viking purchased the U.S. distribution rights back from Bob.

Kerstin passed away in 2002, but her company lives on and her books keep on educating new generations of sewers. Under the guidance of Eric McMaster, her son and current president of Kwik-Sew, the company continues to offer quick-and-easy sewing patterns for both knits and wovens.

Kerstin was an ardent supporter of the American Sewing Guild when it

developed one of its early chapters in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Minneapolis/St. Paul Chapter President Joan Zandlo accepted the Hall of Fame plaque at ASG Conference 2006 on behalf of Kerstin's family. At their annual fashion show in late September, Joan presented the plaque to Eric, and chapter members honored Kerstin by modeling many Kwik-Sew garments in the show.



Joan Zandlo (left) and Regional Representative Denise Dias present the Sewing Hall of Fame plaque to Eric McMaster.