

## Houle nurtures international connections

Barb Houle loves teaching psychology at Riverland Community College. She also loves making a difference in the lives of people in Eswatini, Africa, formerly known as Swaziland.

After graduation from Crosby-Ironton High School, Barb began work on a natural science degree from the College of St. Benedict. While on a study abroad course during her junior year, she realized she wanted to make travel and living abroad part of her future. When she returned home, she began to investigate serving in the Peace Corps.

On completion of her degree, she received a letter telling her that she was accepted to the Peace Corps to teach science in Swaziland. Out came the atlas (no internet then!) to see that Swaziland is a land-locked country on the eastern flank of South Africa where it adjoins Mozambique.

Barb greatly enjoyed her two years of Peace Corps service. She made a lifelong friendship with another teacher at her school, Lindiwe Sibisi. After completing her Peace Corps commitment, she returned to the United States and did several jobs before completing a master's degree and then a Ph.D. in Psychology. She was then hired at Riverland.

Swaziland has contin-



**Carolyn Bogott**  
American Association of University Women

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**Barb Houle**

ued to call to her, and she has made numerous trips back, including spending two sabbatical years there. On the 2009-10 sabbatical, Barb and her friend Lindiwe Sibisi visited a patient in a hospital.

Barb noticed that "the patients had nothing to do while they were recovering, no books, magazines, TV, nothing."

In discussing her observation with her friend, the project, "Read to Recovery" was born. They formulated a plan to raise funds to send books from the USA to be distributed to hospitals and health care centers. The project

has continued since that start in 2010, with the generous help of many donors, and has shipped countless books to Swaziland.

In 2017, on her second sabbatical trip, Barb was able to observe the success of the project in getting the patients' minds off their health issues and lowering their stress.

Later in 2017, a connection was made with Books for Africa, a nonprofit that is the largest shipper of books to Africa. This partnership between Read to Recovery and this larger organization has greatly enhanced fundraising and provided an avenue for shipping more books.

Barb and Lindiwe Sibisi undertook the goal of collecting and shipping a container of 22,000 books to Swaziland. They reached their goal in 2019 and Barb was there to help Lindiwe Sibisi deliver the books to schools, as well as medical facilities.

"It was wonderful to see the joy and excitement of the recipients," Barb said.

The current goal is to raise funds to ship a second container of books. Barb is so grateful for the generosity of Riverland's bookstore which donated older editions to Books for Africa. She also thanks the numerous other donors, including Austin's Friends of the Library, that have given to the

Read to Recovery project. Financial donations can be made at [booksforafrica.org](http://booksforafrica.org).

Barb's life and teaching have been greatly enhanced by this close association with a place so far away. She cherishes her personal blessings of educational and travel opportunities, and in turn, she strives to give back through service.

We salute you, Barb Houle, for being a wonderful world citizen and reminding us that great things can come from simple ideas.

*For more information about the Austin Branch of AAUW, contact Sue Grove [sue.grove@riverland.edu](mailto:sue.grove@riverland.edu) or Carolyn Bogott [csbogott@gmail.com](mailto:csbogott@gmail.com). The American Association of University Women, now AAUW, is open to anyone who has completed a two-year degree or beyond. AAUW welcomes men who support our objectives and there are student memberships available. AAUW has been empowering women since 1881. We support equity and education for women. Scholarships are offered, as well as help in litigation in cases dealing with sex discrimination. We are the most important and highly respected research and lobbying organization dealing with women's issues such as equal opportunity and job equality.*