



Sharon E. Sutton

(1941 -)

Inducted: 1997

Era: Contemporary

Locale: Ann Arbor and Dexter

Group: African American

Area(s) of Achievement: Architecture

Sharon E. Sutton, Ph.D., could be characterized as a Renaissance woman. From her achievements in academia, to performing on the Broadway stage, to her advocacy for women's and social issues, she continues to blaze trails for women and men. A professor of architecture at the University of Washington in Seattle, Sutton was the first African American woman promoted to full professor of architecture in the United States. She was also the second African American woman advanced to fellowship in the American Institute of Architects.

As a scholar, journalist, and activist, Sharon E. Sutton has demonstrated exceptional leadership as a black woman in a white society and in several male-dominated professions. Broadening the study of architecture and urban planning to encompass the common good, she is unflappable in promoting social responsibility within her field. At the same time, she has made the general public more aware of their impact on the environment. An advocate of youth participation, Sutton founded and coordinated the Urban Network at the University of Michigan, a national outreach program involving youth in learning about and improving neighborhoods.

Sutton was also an accomplished musician playing the French horn in more than 1,000 performances on Broadway. Even on Broadway, however, she continued connecting with people and making a difference for women. During that period in the 1960s she became involved with a group of women converting run-down properties into livable space on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Sutton has five degrees (in the fields of music, architecture, philosophy, and psychology), is licensed to practice architecture in Michigan and New York, was formerly a Kellogg National Fellow, and has taught at Pratt Institute, Columbia University, the University of Cincinnati, and the University of Michigan. In her academic assignments she has continually mentored women, minority students, and faculty. She has appeared on numerous television and radio programs to call attention to how individuals and communities are affected by their physical surroundings. She has also authored numerous publications, including three books on the importance of the physical environment in children's lives. Her book titled, *Weaving A Tapestry of Resistance*, is about the "places, power and poetry of a sustainable society." The book focuses on the relationship between children and their environment. Through the Urban Network program and as director of the Center for Environmental Design and Education, Sutton has worked with countless school teachers and youth service workers, mostly women, helping them develop environmental education activities in their schools and communities. Her teaching encourages students to go beyond the techniques of planning and design to understand those societal power structures which maintain the status quo.

Photo Credit: Bob Kalmbach