Ladies and gentlemen,

Els Wallenburg

Joost Scholtsz

Before addressing you directly, I would like to offer you a peek behind the scenes of our municipality. When people are nominated for an award, statements of support are always included. In most cases these are a joy to read - especially in these confusing corona times in which we have a great need for positive, connecting news.

We know from experience that the number of 'supporters' per nomination varies. The wording is also diverse. Some statements of support are quite business-like or factual, other such statements are wildly enthusiastic. And sometimes the person reading the nomination becomes teary-eyed being moved by the multitude of heartwarming words.

And such heartwarming words were, and still are spoken, for you both Els Wallenburg and Joost Scholtsz.

For thirty years you have been volunteers at Meet the Dutch, the IHE Delft program that links foreign students to people living in the Netherlands. I already knew how important Meet the Dutch is for students who come to study here in Delft for a year and a half. But after reading the statements of support, I know for sure: Meet the Dutch, your work, can be the difference between 'succeeding' in the Netherlands or not. And it can lead to warm, lifelong friendships.

Together you have taken dozens of foreign students under your wings, you have familiarized them with Delft and its surroundings, and acted as a kind of 'new family'. 
You already were a host family for twenty years when ten years ago an important task was added: that of coordinators of Meet the Dutch. That means linking about 150 foreign students to a Dutch host family every year based on their mutual interests, backgrounds and preferences. Students, ex-students and IHE management are all very grateful to you for all your efforts.

You receive praise for the dedication and professionalism with which you have been doing your job as a volunteer for so long. The students who come to Delft for eighteen months - and in some cases even longer - come from sixty different countries from all over the world. The statements of support show that you are both committed with heart and soul to all these students. Showing genuine interest you talk, call, email, send newsletters, organize events and support the students where necessary.

In many cases, this support is urgently needed. The students often leave behind their loved ones, family and friends. In some cases, they are unable to visit their home during their studies - sometimes due to political tensions in their home country. That is also why it is very important that they feel at home in Delft. And when one reads the statements of support, it is clear that you play a very important role in that respect. Both of you are hailed several times as a family where students learn about typical Dutch things like the shuffleboard or Sinterklaas, but especially also the ordinary daily life things such as drinking coffee together, going to the market or shopping.

The foreign students, who often live together, indicate that it is sometimes difficult to come into contact with ‘ordinary Dutch people’. Being able to occasionally break out of their ‘student bubble’ with like-minded people makes them happy. And although I would certainly not
want to qualify you as a 'ordinary Dutch people', you make sure everyone feels welcome and can function more easily in this for them foreign country.

Dear Mr. Scholtsz and Ms. Wallenburg, your help is ‘priceless’, is what students and ex-students have written. They cherish lifelong friendships and warm memories of people who display completely selfless commitment. How loved you are is also obvious from the fact that your reputation has preceded you. Some new students, having been informed by ex-students, ask if you could be their host family already before they come to Delft.

You have already taken so many students under your wing, gave them a taste of Dutch cuisine and, above all, made them feel welcome. Or, as an ex-student describes: ‘Els and Joost will remain my Dutch family for the rest of my life. In five years in Delft I grew as a person and never felt alone thanks to them. I am grateful to Els and Joost for their friendship and the great work they have done for so many students for so many years. I can't thank them enough for that.’

IHE staff, students and ex-students describe you both as ‘open minded’, interested and respectful towards other cultures.

With this commitment you are great representatives of our beautiful city of Delft: excellent!

Before finishing my speech, I would like to say something about both of you separately:

Dear Mrs. Wallenburg, dear Els, in one of the statements of support you are called ‘the artist’ of the two of you. You are not only very active within Meet the Dutch, but there are countless other activities in which you both
distinguish yourself in a positive way. I will name a few: you organize concerts in your living room, you are involved in Groei & Bloei and the Open Garden Day in Delft, and you are very active in your own neighbourhood. Whether it's decorating a mini library, a mosaic bench or planting flowers in public spaces: you are there, you do it and are therefore well-known and loved by your neighbors.

And you, Mister Scholtz,

in the statements of support we received for you and your wife, you are described as the ‘handy intellectual’. A man who is also very smart and handy in the field of IT. But you are mainly described as a person who volunteers to open his house and heart to others. Beautiful words that renders one speechless. Words from ex-students and others who have been helped by you.

I conclude with a quote from one of the statements by an ex-student. I quote: ‘Everything Els and Joost do comes from their hearts; they are beautiful, powerful people. Moreover, they show that ‘sharing’ does not mean you lose something, but that you win twice as much.’

That is why I am very happy to announce that it has pleased His Majesty to appoint you both, Elisabeth Wallenburg and Joost Scholtz, as Members of the Order of Orange-Nassau.