

2015 PARK UNIVERSITY ALUMNI AWARDS LUNCHEON

The Marlowe Sherwood Memorial Service Award recognizes Park University alumni for volunteer service to the community and/or civic organizations.

TIM DECKER, '82, DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S DIVISION OF THE MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

| Tim Decker remembers being cautioned about pursuing a degree in social work. "I met with an advisor who told me about how I'd work with some of the most difficult children and families. That I would spend long hours working, often in challenging environments, and that I would be giving a lot of myself to help others — many who likely would not appreciate me," he said.

It was that conversation that sealed his decision. "The more I heard about social work, the more excited I got," he said. "Without a doubt, I found my calling and life's mission — to uplift others and make a difference through a career in social work."

Growing up in a family of seven children, Decker worked in his father's grocery store where he watched his dad always go out of his way to help customers. His mother was involved in church, school, Girl Scouts and other community volunteer efforts. "I grew up with parents who modeled doing kind things for others in need and being an active part of their community. They were very influential role models for me," he said. While working in a summer camp during high school, Decker discovered his own ability to help others, especially young people. That's when his future career path began to crystalize.

Decker came to Park University on a track scholarship from his hometown in St. Louis. At Park he met his wife, Laurie (Hendry) Decker, '81, and the two were married in Park's Graham Tyler Memorial Chapel on the Parkville Campus. With a bachelor's degree in social work and psychology, Decker began his 30-year career in social work to become a nationally recognized leader in the field with a focus on protecting children and youth from abuse and neglect.

Decker was appointed the director of the Missouri Division of Youth Services in 2007 and transitioned to director of the Children's Division of the Missouri Department of Social Services in 2013. During his tenure in the MDYS, Decker led the agency to earn the Harvard Innovations in American Government Award for Child and Family System Reform in 2008. Under his leadership, the agency increased educational completion rates by more than 87 percent, reduced recidivism, increased productive involvement rates and safely reduced the number of young people in state custody.

As part of the award, Missouri hosted site visits from more than 20 states. "I'm especially proud of this national honor because it helped advance the work we were doing in Missouri throughout the country to enable more kids to benefit from services that we know actually worked." To share his experiences, Decker frequently speaks across the country, including serving as a guest lecturer at the John F. Kennedy School of Government and Harvard Law School.

Decker has received many accolades over the years, but helping others each day is his greatest reward. "The opportunity to change lives is tremendous. When I came to Park in 1978, I couldn't have imagined I would lead two state agencies devoted to serving children and families. The chance to influence so many lives in my 30-year career in social work is just amazing to me."

A black and white portrait of Tim Decker, a man with dark hair, wearing a suit and tie, looking directly at the camera. The portrait is partially obscured by a dark, semi-transparent speech bubble on the right side of the page.

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