



Sharon Decker's life is a testament to the values of leadership, community service, and lifelong learning.

Born in Stanly County, Decker's childhood was steeped in the spirit of community. Her parents were actively involved in local initiatives, and their home was a haven for those in need. Decker credits this environment for instilling in her the values of generosity and service.

As Decker reflects on her upbringing, she expresses immense gratitude for the lessons she learned from her parents. "It wasn't unusual for there to be a stranger at the dinner table, someone they had met in the community and needed a meal," reflects Decker. "I'm very grateful for growing up knowing what it means to live in community."

Decker's choice to attend The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she was accepted into the school's consumer science program, marked the beginning of a remarkable career. This field of study resonated with her deeply. "There was an integration of work and family. It was about childhood development, family relations, food, and nutrition," says Decker.

During her college years, Decker worked for Oster Manufacturing Company demonstrating small appliances

in Belk stores across the Southeast. This experience honed her skills in customer education and set the stage for her future career.

"I have had a lot of mentors. I'd start with Dr. Naomi Albanese, who was the dean of the School of Consumer Sciences at UNC Greensboro. She also happened to serve on the corporate board of Duke Power Company at the time. She was a woman well ahead of her time," reflects Decker.

Following the Oster job and an opportunity in California, Decker was recruited to Duke Power where she worked as a consumer educator demonstrating microwave ovens, which were new innovations at the time.

"We were talking about energy conservation, energy management, and the importance of nuclear energy in providing a way to have safe, low-cost energy in the Carolinas," says Decker.

Her decision to stay in the Carolinas was influenced by her love for the region and a budding relationship with her now-husband of nearly 45 years.

Decker's 17-year tenure at Duke Power was marked by continuous learning, development, and a series of significant achievements. She rose through the ranks to become the first female vice president at Duke Power, a milestone that opened doors for other women and minority groups.

In addition to her corporate achievements, Decker played a pivotal role in saving the Duke Mansion in Charlotte. “That’s the only physical evidence we have that Mr. Duke ever lived in town. It’s a historic place and such an important part of the fabric of the community,” says Decker.

Her journey continued with a role as North Carolina Secretary of Commerce, a position she was appointed to by Governor Pat McCrory. In this role, Decker led the formation of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, an organization that has contributed significantly to the state’s economic growth.

“I’ll always be grateful to Governor McCrory for reaching out and giving me that chance. It was out of the blue, and not something I was seeking. I’m proud of the work we did together,” Decker reflects.

Decker’s dedication to community development and economic growth remains unwavering. Her latest venture with Tryon International Equestrian Partners has generated over 4,700 jobs and transformed the economic landscape of the Foothills region.

Community, continuous learning, and the power of collective effort have been the cornerstones of Decker’s remarkable career. She is quick to note that her journey is a testament to the belief that no individual can accomplish great work alone and that effective leadership involves identifying and filling gaps within a team to achieve greater outcomes.

Decker and her family have called Western North Carolina home for the last 25 years since she was recruited there

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as President of the Doncaster Division of Tanner Companies. After leaving that role, they chose to call WNC home and are now deeply involved in recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

“We’ve never seen anything like this. It is going to be a long process of recovery,” says Decker. “I want people to understand that regardless of how swiftly we move, the damage is deep and broad. The hurricane had a very large impact on communities that were already hurting in a lot

of ways. We’ve got a chance to rebuild better than we were and to make the regional economy stronger than before.”

Looking ahead, Decker is excited about investing more of her time in WNC’s recovery, specifically in the area of housing and ultimately her upcoming “rewirement,” a term she prefers over retirement. She plans to spend her time engaging more in encouraging people in their spiritual journeys, continuing service on Corporate Boards, and finding places to continue to make a difference in building community. Decker says she looks forward to spending more time with her family, walking, and embarking on spiritual pilgrimages, including a third visit to the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

“Some people collect things. I collect people. I love people. I’ve been blessed to be able to interface with a lot of folks who’ve made a difference in my life,” reflects Decker.

Sharon Decker’s life is a shining example of what it means to live with purpose, lead with integrity, and serve with compassion. Her journey is a source of inspiration for all who aspire to make a difference in their communities and beyond.