



The heart of a MISSIONARY

On the first day of her senior year of high school in 1975, Marlene Decker started working at Divine Word College as part of her school's office education program. This fall, Marlene plans to retire after 48 years of service.

During her career, she worked primarily in the business office doing clerical tasks and later accounting. Seven years ago, she was named Business Office Director. Since then,

Marlene standardized systems, streamlined procedures and ensured that the college received a clean annual audit. But her impact on the college goes far beyond crunching numbers and balancing books. Marlene is a person who makes connections. "She takes time with everyone she meets. So many people know the college because of her," said Fr. Joe McDermott, SVD, who has been friends with Marlene and her family for more than 40 years.

Marlene and her husband, Jay, are dairy farmers. In 1984, their first daughter was born and diagnosed with a rare genetic condition that causes mental and physical disabilities. The young couple was blindsided by the news. Marlene felt overwhelmed and figured she'd never be able to return to work. One day, about a month after Rachel was born, she got a visit from her boss, Bro. Leonard Bauer, SVD.

"He said, 'Marlene, I want you back in the office Monday morning. We need you and you need us,'" she recalls. "It was the best thing that ever happened to me, because I probably would still be ... well, I don't know where I would be. I was depressed. He said, 'You can call the doctors during your work day, but I just think it would be best for you to get out of here and get with people.' And he was so right."

Rachel spent most of her life in nearby group homes so she could receive the care she needed until her death in 2014. Marlene and Jay had six more children: Renee, Richard, Teresa, Johnna, Katelyn and Robert.

As their household grew, so did their farm. Their herd of 50 cows grew to 500. When milk prices were down, Marlene said she was always grateful for her steady job at the college.

For many years, Marlene woke up at 4:30 a.m. to help milk the cows. Then she returned to the house, got ready for work and prepared the kids for the day before heading to the college. At night, the cows needed to be milked again, dinner needed to be made and the piles of laundry were no

small feat. The kids all had chores and were expected to do their part.

The Decker children learned a lot from their mom, including what it means to be a missionary. "As young

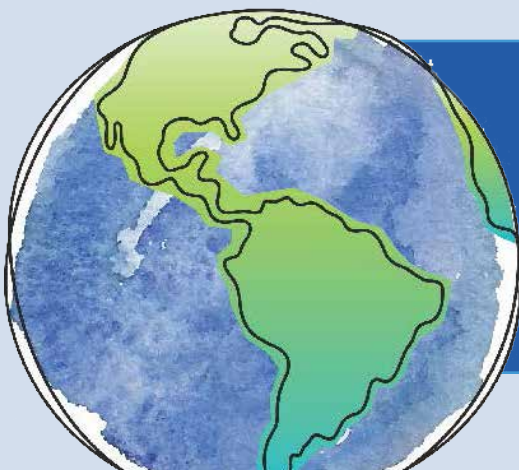
kids, they grew up with students and SVD members coming into the house all the time," Marlene said. "They would come to see the farm, so the kids were very accustomed to it. I have a guest book at home and when people would stop by, I had them all sign it."

As it turned out, Marlene is a natural missionary. Her deep roots in the community and the SVD world helped her foster genuine connections. One day, a local woman who sews was looking for an outlet for her creations. Marlene asked her to make blankets for the college's students. Soon, there was a whole crew of people making blankets for the students and for Divine Word Missionaries to distribute to the homeless. Marlene also coordinates an initiative that collects donated chalices. She ensures that the sacred vessels are hand-delivered to priests serving in poor parishes and villages that can't afford to purchase them.

From big gestures to small ones, like leaving a cookie or loaf of bread in Fr. Joe's mailbox, Marlene leaves a lasting impact on people. Those connections don't just fade away when students and SVDs leave Divine Word College. Marlene has a knack for maintaining friendships. "She's just a person who has so much charisma, so much influence over all of us in this place," Fr. Joe said. "Her presence here at the college, I think it can't be measured."



Marlene enjoys clownin' around in support of a local fundraising event.



SAVE THE DATE!

World Mission Sunday

Sunday, October 22

starting at 1pm

*All are welcome to join the
public celebration at
Divine Word College*