

Obituaries

Bob Decker; former senator, president of Bemidji State

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By Lucy Y. Her
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Bob Decker led the "great expansions" at Bemidji State University while he was its president.

During his 12-year tenure, eight buildings were built, three existing ones were renovated and student enrollment was at an all-time high: 5,787.

Decker, who also was a former state senator, died Tuesday in a nursing home in Ventura, Calif., after having Alzheimer's disease for several years. He was 76.



Decker sought change for Bemidji State University.

Decker was president of Bemidji State during a chaotic time, said Al Nohner, the university news and publications director.

"The '60s was a very tumultuous time," he said. "He came in and he was exactly what the university needed at that time. He was a calming influence to the campus."

Decker received his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from Texas A&M University. He began his career in education as an agriculture teacher. In 1957, he became an associate professor of agricultural economics at Sul Ross State College, and in 1961 became an administrator at

Odessa College. Both schools are in Texas.

Before becoming president of Bemidji State, Decker was acting chancellor of Minnesota's state universities.

He served as Bemidji State's president from 1968 to 1980. During that time, he introduced such academic programs as computer science, criminal justice, technical illustration/graphic design, communication media and American Indian studies.

He also helped establish the Center for Environmental Studies, the Foreign Studies Program, the Outdoor Program Center and the Veterans Affairs Office.

After his stint as president, Decker returned to teaching, retiring in 1988. In November 1987, Decker, a Republican, was elected to the state Senate in a special election. He served until 1990.

Duane Benson of Lanesboro, executive director of the Minnesota Business Partnership, said he recruited Decker to run.

"I knew him by reputation," he said. "I don't think I've ever met a person nicer than him. He couldn't say anything negative about his opponent, so I had to go and do the heavy" work.

Decker was defeated when he ran for reelection in 1990. He and his family moved to California in 1996.

Jackie Decker said her husband always listened to both sides.

"He just said he always had to look at himself in the mirror, so he felt he had to do what he thought was right," she said.

In addition to his wife, Decker is survived by two sons, David of Houston and Jack of Clear Lake, Iowa; a daughter, Diane Decker-Mahin of Camarillo, Calif.; a sister, Marilyn of Kyle, Texas, and four grandchildren.

Services are pending.