



Special Edition 2019

# The Journal

of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin



***Honoring a Legacy***







# A TRIBUTE TO CHRIS DECKER

# 2019

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of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin

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# Christopher Decker



### Editors Note:

Adapted from Chris Decker's obituary.

**C**hristopher J. Decker, age 54, of Madison, Wis., passed away on Tuesday, July 30, 2019, at Agrace HospiceCare after a courageous, hard fought battle with glioblastoma that lasted more than three years. Chris consistently waged that battle with undeniable courage, a spirit of grace, and a determined perseverance to be “regular Chris.” He was at Agrace for 15 weeks, every day with a smile and non-stop visits from friends and family.

Chris was born Sept. 6, 1964, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the son of Richard and Patricia (Miller) Decker. He graduated from Maquoketa Community High School, attended St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., and graduated with a professional degree in Pharmacy from the University of Iowa. In 1988, Chris married Catherine Aiello.

Following graduation from pharmacy school, Chris served for two years as Director of Professional Affairs for the Iowa Pharmacy Association before being selected to serve as CEO of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin, a position he held for nearly 30 years. In Wisconsin, he transformed a struggling organization into one that was purpose filled and vision driven. Chris loved his work and everything about it and took great pride in helping make a positive difference in his profession. He challenged everyone to “be a difference maker!” Chris received numerous accolades including the most recent Certificate of Merit Award from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy.

The only thing Chris loved more than his work was his family. His children, Joe, Mary Catherine and Johnny, brought joy to his life every day and he was so proud of them! He was their champion and advocate. He strived to help them become caring, capable young adults. Two events this summer that brought special joy to Chris were the marriage of Mary Catherine to Bob Pawelski and the announcement by Joe and Lilly Small that they are expecting a

baby girl in October, that they have named Iris Ann.

Chris provided his colleagues, friends and family with inspiring lessons in life, filled with kindness, gratitude, and faith. His love of family, great restaurants, terrific wine, golf and laughter provided a platform for building relationships with people throughout the country. He loved playing golf. He served on the board at Nakoma Golf and Country Club and was president of the board at the time of his diagnosis. Members of Nakoma were some of his closest friends. Chris' ability to connect with people created lasting friendships cherished by him and all who knew him. He made everyone feel that they were his best friend.

Chris is survived by his three children, Joe Decker, Mary Catherine (Bob) Pawelski and John Decker, all of Madison; his parents, Richard and Patricia Decker of Maquoketa, Iowa; brother, Todd Decker of Waukege, Iowa; sister, Laura Decker of Iowa City, Iowa; and numerous aunts, uncles and cousins. He was preceded in death

by his grandparents, Joe and Marguerite Miller and Carl and Bernice Decker; aunt and uncle, Jayne and LaVerne Keppler; and uncle, Robert Gaffney.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held at Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church, 401 S. Owen Drive, Madison, at 11 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 12, 2019. The visitation was held at Gunderson Fitchburg Funeral and Cremation Care from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 11, 2019, and at the church from 10 a.m. until the time of the Mass on Monday. A luncheon and celebration of life followed at Nakoma Golf and Country Club, 4145 Country Club Road, Madison. All were encouraged to participate at this time with memories and stories that include Chris. The burial was at Sacred Heart Cemetery in Maquoketa, Iowa at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 13, 2019.

The Decker family would like to thank the compassionate healthcare professionals and volunteers at Agrace HospiceCare and UW Hospital and Clinics for the excellent care Chris received.





## The Journey: As Told by Chris and His Family



### Editors Note:

These excerpts were taken from CaringBridge, which is a website designed as a personal health journal and to rally friends and family during any type of health journey.

The following excerpts were chosen by volunteer PSW members in order to share a glimpse of Chris' story that was posted on CaringBridge. These posts show the chronological journey from diagnosis, to the very end when Chris' mother, Pat, wrote the final journal entry in September of 2019. To read all of Chris' posts, go to: <https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/chrisdecker>.

### March 25, 2016

Hi everyone. Thanks for caring about me. I was as surprised as anyone by this series of health events this week. One never knows God's plans.

Sunday night I went to Chicago and checked into a suburban hotel for a meeting the following day. The meeting was going to be an excellent meeting on a topic that is a leading area of interest for pharmacy organizations like PSW, where I work. There were about 20 people from around the country at the meeting. All good thinkers. I was there for window dressing. Good thing my mom had given me a new sport coat a couple weeks earlier. My mom has always had good timing and good taste.

I watched the Badger victory on Sunday night and then hit the hay. Got up the next morning and did a workout and had breakfast.

At the meeting: We met at the corporate headquarters of NABP and the office has a terrific board room where we met. We sat down and after about 30 minutes I began to experience some weird feelings on my left side. It started with my leg and then moved to my arm. It felt like my limbs were falling asleep over time. As these symptoms were beginning, the guys sitting next to me noticed and asked if I was OK. After about the fifth ask and my fifth reply of being "OK", Dan Luce from Milwaukee called for someone to call 911 and the meeting stopped because of me. I recall

about 5 people pushing aspirin tablets at me, before the paramedics arrived...good to be around pharmacists. So, apparently it appeared I was having a stroke. Ambulance arrived and I left the meeting room feet first in a stretcher. That was two firsts for me.

At the Chicago hospital: I was alert but not really sharp. They conducted a head CT scan and MRI. A couple of the top meeting honchos came to the hospital to be with me. Good guys. Short version is the scans showed a mass on my brain but no bleeding, ruling out a stroke. That was good!

The medical staff made sure I was stable and comfortable. Some of my family made the trek to Chicago to see me and to find out what was next. The decision was to travel home to Madison and to be evaluated and treated at UW Hospital. I have been fortunate to make friends with some VIPs at the hospital over the years and they pulled some strings to get me in and seen by Wisconsin's best neurology team and very best brain surgeon, Dr. Baskaya. I had my second ambulance ride, this one from Chicago to Madison. I learned on that trip ambulances are not equivalent to limos.

At UW: upon arrival on Tuesday afternoon, the UW team assembled and evaluated me. They ordered a full body CT and started some meds to address my symptoms...mostly involuntary movement on the left side of my body. Good pharmacists at UW so they got it right. Short version is I am on an anti-seizure med and a steroid. After a couple days I think my symptoms have lessened a little but that may be wishful thinking too. Initially we thought surgery may be Friday or Monday but it turns out the earliest the Baskaya A-surgery team was available was next Wednesday afternoon. So that's the plan. Will be at UW Hospital till then. But, my boys might bust me out of here tonight to watch the Badger - Notre Dame

NCAA basketball game...they are one of each...I'm rooting for the Badgers, sorry Joe, but MC said she would pick Joe's team over Johnny's...seems the UW-Marquette rivalry might be wearing off on her.

So, that's the deal, still a lot of unknowns but we do know some more than we did and we have a plan. Here's my recount of both:

Known: MRI shows one tumor. Image size of the tumor is 2 cm which is medium sized.

Hopefully the image is the actual size. The surgeon said sometimes the tumors are bigger than they appear in imaging because of how the radiation dye is unevenly up taken. If it is the actual size (as shown) they are confident they can get it out. If it's bigger it will bring about questions and potential complications. The tumor appears to be 1/2 cm behind the motor cortex of the brain which controls all the left side body motor functions so there is little to no margin for a larger tumor without causing surgery complication due to the possibility of damaging the cortex, which would be bad...paralysis type of stuff. They won't know until they get in there and maybe even a day or two after surgery. So, we will know more later next week after surgery is completed but not likely anything more before then. I will post again after surgery. I intend to be a pretty good patient but I also plan to keep the nurses on their toes. Pharmacists too!

Until then, let me say thanks for all the posts and messages. They have been amazing and reassuring. I am so grateful for the support of my many family and friends, both personal and professional. I am so fortunate. And, I am grateful. Thank you.

My plan is to get better and to hit golf balls when the grass is green. Come join me!

Thanks again for your outpouring of love and support.



## April 24, 2016

I would like to begin by reiterating my appreciation for the outpouring of love, support and prayers that have been extended to me by so many people. Hundreds of friends and family members have emailed, texted, Facebooked (yes, I'm on Facebook, sort of) and just come up to me and given me an embrace. It has been more than meaningful to me. It has been uplifting and empowering. I need it and I gratefully accept it all. Thank you.

The month of April has been a whirlwind. I feel great! I really do. I can walk, talk, think, and, I learned recently, even swing a golf club. I also learned swinging a club and making par on a hole are two different things. But, I knew that before discovering the brain tumor too.

I am taking life one day at a time and I'm doing my best to get everything out of each day. I have been able to work, which has been great. I have fantastic support at my office and from the leadership team at PSW. I'm grateful for both the opportunity and support system there. I'm also grateful that I don't have to work...I'm working because I want to work and because I have been given the flexibility and ability to focus on getting well first...to try to heal as much as possible, as quickly as possible, and for as long as possible. I'm also grateful for the support of my family and friends. I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing, and what I will need to do, without them.

I'm told that I'm up and going, doing what I'm doing, because of the skill of Dr. Baskaya, my surgeon. He is the Tiger Woods (of old) of brain surgeons. I was told if it was anyone else, I wouldn't be functioning the way I am able to today. Super grateful here.

So far, I have been able to live every day like normal. My daily functions have been good. I can't drive because I have a seizure risk, but maybe I will be given permission to drive again before too long. After all, driving is easier than hitting a golf ball. And, I want to do both! (I don't really care about hitting a golf ball...it's just an expression of my interest in returning to my normal self.) I mostly want to spend as much time with my friends and family as I possibly can, for as long as I possibly can. Some people, with my type of brain tumors and treatment plans, have over ten years



THE ULTIMATE MEASURE OF A MAN IS NOT WHERE HE STANDS  
IN MOMENTS OF COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE,  
BUT WHERE HE STANDS AT TIMES OF  
CHALLENGE AND CONTROVERSY.

until reoccurrence. I am comfortable being an envelope-pusher. That's my plan.

I will post again next week after "the big gun" treatment stuff begins. Both until then and after treatment starts, I intend to fight and smile every day. That's my strategy...best medical care possible and fight hard, while doing my best to be my best. Thanks for helping me. Thanks for helping my family, especially my kids.

More next week. Thanks again for your support.

## April 29, 2016

As of now, these are my goals...I'd welcome your input to further defining them over time and toward my achievement of them all!

- live as long as possible
- live as well as possible
- live as regular as possible

I think the medical treatments will enable me to do these things. If the treatment plan can get me to 2020, there may be a cure discovered that will allow me to get to 2066 ...that's 50 years from now for those of you who aren't so good at math...you know who you are.

Thanks for all your kindness and support. I accept it all...and I will do everything I can to reciprocate it, whenever I can. Hope to see you soon.

## June 20, 2016

Yesterday was Father's Day. I was happy to be able to spend the day with my dad, my kids, and family in Maquoketa. I know

me having cancer is hard on everyone around me. I'm sorry for being the cause of the grief. And, frankly, I still can't believe it is all real. It's like a bad dream from which I want to wake up. I have learned it's often hard to know what to say to someone fighting cancer. It is such a hardship. My experience tells me that that expression of genuine concern and support, followed by actions consistent with words, is what is most valuable.

I'm trying my best to do my part to be brave and to fight on, living every day. I intend to continue to take what I'm given, live in the present, and try to make a difference in the lives of others in some small way. I want to be a difference maker. That's how I hope to extend today into tomorrow. I often struggle with the weight of my condition but I try to lessen the heaviness by pressing forward and appreciating the time I have with those closest to me.

I will close this post by commenting how proud I am of my three children; Joe, Mary Catherine, and Johnny. They have grown into fine young adults. They're not kids anymore. I cherished spending Father's Day with them yesterday. I'm looking forward to the same next year and the 365 days in between.

P.S. I forgot to mention that I was cleared to drive about three weeks ago and having the greater independence afforded by driving has been great. No sports car, but regular old driving is enough. Besides, I want to have passengers... having more





seats has it's advantages! Plus there is room for golf clubs in the back.

## August 2, 2016

I've had so much support and encouragement. It has come in many forms. It's been really neat and meaningful. Here is a quote that was shared with me that I found inspirational. It's from Albert Einstein.

"There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." I like that and I subscribe to the philosophy of the latter. I also couple it with this one. I'm not sure who said it, "Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start." Taken together, this means I know where I'm at today and anything is possible tomorrow. Miracles are around every corner.

## August 24, 2016

I've received numerous questions about what can be done for me...what I'd like. I'm grateful for the heartfelt and generous offers. And, while reserving the right to add to my answer, here's my reply to that question as a I write this update:

Smile everyday when you get up, say "hi" to someone and make them feel special, just from your interaction with them. That will make me feel good.

## January 17, 2017

While I strive to be independent, I have learned I can't succeed alone with this disease. I need and gratefully accept a lot of care and support that has been directed my way. I can't get too much. My oncologist recommended that I think of a bubble around me and try stuffing that bubble with as much positivity as possible, and allowing others to stuff the bubble too. I like to do that anyway so that suits me.

I know my disease has been hard on the people closest to me. It doesn't just affect me. We all need positive bubbles in order to ward-off the bad stuff and retain the good stuff. I invite everyone to create your own bubble. Not one that is impermeable, just one that traps the good and holds it tight.

2017 has something in store for all of us. Every day offers us something, as well as an opportunity for even more the next day. Life doesn't travel on a straight line, we know that. I hope I'm able to navigate the curves and bumps that are sure to be

ahead. With your continued compassion and support, I think I will. And, maybe 2017 will bring about a GBM treatment advancement, and maybe, just maybe, a cure.

## April 11, 2017

The title of my talk was Itty Bitty, Happy Socks, and Bright Spots...so those were the things I talked about.

- Itty Bitty is the nickname of a women's basketball player from Miss St who hit a game winning shot in overtime during the women's NCAA Final Four in March to beat perennial powerhouse UConn and snap their 111 game winning streak. Itty Bitty showed courage and might to overcome long odds. I see her success as an example for us all.
- I was introduced to Happy Socks this year by my sister, Laura. She gave me (and others) several pairs as a way to create some man-made sunshine and a smile to start one's day. You can't help but smile when putting on a pair of crazy looking socks, especially for a normally conservative dresser like me.
- Bright spots: We all need them in our day. I am fighting to live so there can



be sparkle and sunshine in others. I love seeing sparkle and sunshine. There may not be a direct cause and effect, between my effort and a positive impact on others, but my hope is that exhibiting my will serves as an example to the people close to me and that they choose to shine and sparkle every day... because there sparkle inside us all.

Remarkably, over the past year I have encountered or learned about 20-30 people who have lost a friend or family member to glioblastoma. I hadn't heard of GBM before this past year. And there are dozens more who have been impacted by another type of cancer. It's something common to all of us: friends and family members that are battling a deadly disease. As one of those people, I can say there are good days and hard days. And, although some days are brighter than others, I have found the opportunity to enjoy even a little bit of sunshine and being the recipient of a good cheer reinforces optimism for a brighter day, every day. I appreciate both the sunshine and the good cheer.

I want to give a big thanks to you for taking the time to read this message and for your continued support and encouragement. It makes a difference to me. I will try to pass it along and make a difference for others, as I can.

And, don't forget, when it's cloudy outside there is always a sun above the clouds...and there's always Happy Socks!

## May 2, 2017

**An opinion:** Life is a funny thing that most of us take for granted, me included. We know it's precious but we often don't spend a lot of time thinking about it or talking about it. Perhaps we should take more time appreciating and acknowledging all for which we are grateful.

When I was in the orthopedic clinic I was struck by a poster hanging in the waiting area. I took a picture of it and I will post it to the photos section on my CaringBridge page tomorrow, if you want to look for it. It was a photo collage of USA athletes competing in the Paralympics. The message on the poster was this: **Amazing Awaits**

The poster inspired me because it illustrated determination, fortitude and hope. There was no guarantee of success

but there was a chance for it, even if the odds were long and the difficulty level high.

Amazing awaits: None of us really ever knows what's next in life but we can always strive for the best, despite the difficulty or odds against it. We can strive because of hope. Hope is important. And, as with probably every Paralympian, hope must be nurtured and supported by others in order to be realized.

I have hope and I have a chance. The MRI scan results give me hope for continued improvement. My hope to achieve can be realized with all the love and support that I'm extended by those of you who care about me; we are interconnected. Together we have a chance of succeeding... and I think the odds are better than one in a million!

## August 18, 2017

Attitude and effort are the two little things in life that make a big difference. I know that's true and I'll keep trying my best to do my best. I'll also do now, what

I have to do, in order to do, in the future, what I want to do (my mom gave me that thought and I liked it!)

## September 11, 2017

I am so grateful to all those who have been supportive of me...my family, friends, co-workers and pharmacy leaders from across Wisconsin and the country have been so immensely supportive and helpful. It would be very easy to be drug down by the dire diagnosis of GBM, but these friends and family have helped me squeeze out the darkness and focus on the light that is ever present above the clouds. The surgical and oncology teams at the University of Wisconsin have been stellar too. I wouldn't be breathing, doing push-ups, and hitting golf balls without them, let alone the chance to just be with the people who I love...with special gratitude to my parents, siblings, and children. Their support and encouragement has been unyielding since my initial diagnosis on March 21, 2016. Love, sparkle, and





sunshine are great adjunct therapies! I've found fine wine to be a pretty good adjunct too.

I feel good and I'm striving to be as well physically and emotionally as possible. My next post will probably be in November as I complete the six week stint of radiation. I hope to share good news and positive vibes with you then. Thanks for caring about me. If you're going to be in La Crosse this week, come find me; I'll have a pocketful of drink tickets to share for the conference receptions.

## February 22, 2018

I am willing to take anything that gives me the best chance to beat this thing they call GBM. It doesn't go down easy, that's for damn sure. But neither do I. I guess dealing with something like this is a situation where people say it gives you a chance to learn what you're made of. It takes some grit and resilience to keep going...and lots of help. It's not good territory for going alone and expecting a good result.

I'm going to do my best to continue to fight and smile simultaneously. I appreciate the unyielding support that I have had from so many. It really helps me. I love sunshine, and that is what the support is for me. Sunshine penetrates darkness and brightens the world. A kind word, a smile, a hug, they are all forms of sunshine.

JFK once said "One person can make a difference, and everyone should try."

## March 1, 2018

A doctor just stopped in . . .

Chris asked: Good resection?

The doctor replied: Yes. I wasn't in there, but that's what Dr. Baskaya told me.

Chris asked: What were you doing, goofing off?

A bit later the doctor was doing a quick check and said: Smile and show me all of your teeth.

Chris said: Glad I used Crest White Strips yesterday.

## April 10, 2018

There's one last thing that I haven't really confessed, but I thought I would share. Hear it is: This stuff is scary.

I read a quote about courage. It said courage is not the absence of fear, but rather, forging forward, despite of it.

I'm trying to be brave. Knowing you are with me, surrounding and supporting me, helps tremendously. Picture an arena with me and an opponent in it, where the entire gallery watching the battle is on my side, no matter what. That's how I look at it and how your support makes me feel. I recognize many don't just watch and cheer; many have stepped in and have helped me fight the cancer and the darkness in my life, so it can be replaced with good health,

brightness, strength and kindness. Thank you.

## August 15, 2018

My dad just said to me as we left the hospital today, "Chris, I know this is another big hill to climb and it's not easy to climb it, but you're a mountain climber, you've already climbed big mountains and you'll climb this newest mountain too."

All I could say was, "Thanks Dad, I'll do my best, I promise." I also added an I love you to both my parents. I know the power of hearing those two words from a child. I was glad to be able to say thanks.

I pray for sunshine and good health. I'll do my best to climb the next mountain.

I've heard golf spikes can double for mountain climbing. I have a couple pairs.

I will also draw on the dozens who have offered me unqualified friendship, support, and prayer. That support has enabled me to be strong and resilient. I feel it and I'll be forever grateful for it. I'm also a better man for having learned it from the gifters of it. Thank you.

## August 29, 2018

People are either "bucket fillers" or "bucket spillers". The people involved in my life are intent on helping to fill my bucket. I will do all that I can to return the filling. Love and support can multiply. It's not a finite amount that we have inside of us. I'm rooting for my love to grow and my cancer to die.

I look forward to smiling with you soon!

## October 28, 2018

Wisconsin winter is approaching and the nice walking days are likely few in number now. Perhaps my return to driving will be just before the snow begins to pile up and the cold winds begin to really blow.

But with good news from my November MRI, I'll be more than happy to brave the winter walk. I'll even dance and make snow angels along the way. It will be my small tribute of thanks for the good graces I've been given from above.

Speaking of angels and heaven, thank you for your prayers and support. They are working. Not only do I believe the prayers are working through God to help me heal and be strong, the number of comments,





cards, hugs, messages, and genuine support I have received have lifted my spirit everyday.

It would be dark and lonely to not have you with me. I'm grateful that I am not alone and that I don't feel alone. Thanks for that!

Given life's daily challenges, it's often easy to overlook our blessings and good fortune, me too. It's sometimes easier said than done but it's important for each of us to be thankful for what we have and to treat everyone with kindness. We have each felt meanness and kindness. Let's strive for kindness.

## November 22, 2018

Unfortunately, last week's MRI scan revealed tumor growth in the two most recently affected areas of my brain: the right frontal lobe and the left occipital (back) part of the brain. That's not good and it was disappointing to learn, to say the least. I am most concerned, however, how disappointing and scary news like this tumor growth impacts some of those closest to me. I'm sorry that the concern can't be limited to just me and spare everyone else.

Like in cards, we have to play the hand we're dealt in life. I don't intend to fold. I'd love to draw a wild card and win, but until that happens, I'll play straight-up as well as I can.

Getting to stable, free of conflict, and to a point where a "re-start button" can be tried, supported and sustained are my goals. Just think how great that can be one day!

A "re-start button" isn't synonymous with the "Easy" button made famous in a TV commercial. But, even if it's not easy; it's possible. That's my hope, dream, and goal: to restart, live, give, and make a difference for a long, long time.

I heard a speaker summarize his philosophy to a joyful life by stating this: ***"Love the life you live and love who you live it with."*** That's what I intend to do.

Psychology says focusing on possibilities brings about opportunities and focusing on problems brings about more problems.

Let's consider what's possible, play the hand as well as it can be played, and go from there. Maybe CCNU will be the wild card that enables a winning hand, attainment of the "re-start button", and

joyful days, weeks, and years ahead. Please stick with me. I need good partners. I don't know how to play solitaire and I don't like the idea of it.

## January 16, 2019

I'm happy to tell you the story in detail, about what I dreamed and prayed. In short, I asked God to take any remaining tumor cells in my brain to outer space and to deposit them in a black-hole where they can't hurt anybody.

And then I asked for a chance to live a long and joyful life, to be with the people I love, and to do the things I can do to make the world a better place and to do it with the people I can help and that can help me in that regard.

I believe that I can contribute so much, but I know it's multiplied if I have the chance to do it together with you... my family and friends. I'm asking for God's allowance and your ongoing help and support. I know I can't succeed alone and I don't want to be alone.

Relationships are vital to me.

Here's a profound, Yogi Berra-like statement: I love being with people who I love being with.

So that's that. I had a good scan and I hope to build upon it. That's me; I want to accomplish, appreciate, and then strive to accomplish more, and make a positive difference in the lives of others... starting with those closest to me.

## May 5, 2019

What a gift to receive messages from family and good friends. Mom is right. I am blessed to have you all in my life and I am so grateful. Thank you.

The sun was shining bright today and my sister and I were basking in it while she was helping me with messages. My vision still isn't hot, but my thinking and physical feeling is about as good as ever. I'm so happy for those two significant factors. I feel pretty normal and I promise to join you in our continued pursuit of making a difference. One of my goals is to have hospice reflect an upward achievement and expression of love and gratitude every day. Let's keep making a difference together while enjoying every bit of sunshine along the way! Sleep well and yes, let's make it a great week!

## July 30, 2019

This will be the shortest post, but one that makes the most profound difference in our lives.

Chris passed away tonight at 5:29. Our lives are changed forever. He died the way he lived...thinking of others.

It doesn't seem possible Chris won't be physically with us going forward. We do know though that he has made an impact on so many lives. We'll think of him on sunny days, when we hear a cardinal's call or the "whack" of a golf ball! We'll think of his manners, his mannerisms and his little sayings. "I'll be darned!" "We'll leave it at that!" "Perfect is pretty good!" And a hundred others!

## September 5, 2019

### ***From Chris' mom, Pat Decker***

Words just haven't come easy when I've thought about adding what might be a final post for me on CaringBridge. But when September rolled around, and with Chris' birthday being tomorrow, September 6th, it seemed fitting to post something. It's hard when there is such a void in our lives; when things have changed so much and yet life goes on. So many memories pop up each day. Memories of Chris' birthday last year when all the family went to Vin Santo and had a great celebration! Remembering that three days prior to that celebration he was hospitalized over Labor Day weekend! He certainly was a rubber ball that could bounce back time after time! We were all hopeful that would continue to be the case, but eventually the Glioblastoma won out. It finally took the wind out of his sails, but he gave it his all right up to the end!

We did have a wonderful celebration of Chris' life on August 11th, 12th and 13th. Chris had expressed his wishes regarding the visitation, funeral and celebration of life, and we carried them out as best we could. He didn't want it to be a somber time with lots of tears shed. (Of course, there were tears shed, but then you'd think about what Chris would want, and you'd shape right up! ) You could just hear him say, "Come on now!" He would have loved visiting with everybody that came; would have been humbled by the numbers and by the kind words spoken. What a difference he made in so many people's lives! The notes that were written in cards and the



stories shared...some so very candid, and all very sincere. To say THANK YOU just isn't enough. There were so many kindnesses shown, so many memorials made, beautiful flowers, so many cards of condolence. We have stacks of thank you cards to mail out-and we will get to them! For now, to each of you reading this, please know how very much everything you've done whether it was a visit, a phone call, volunteering, a letter or email...every single thing has been genuinely appreciated!

Father Mark did an outstanding job with his homily at mass. When we were choosing readings, he mentioned that in Sirach health professions are talked about... both the doctor and the druggist. If you've ever heard one of Father Marks homilies, you wouldn't be surprised at how he totally wove that in.

The eulogies were wonderful! All of them! Tom Temple probably knows Chris as well as anyone could. They are two peas in a pod. Tom touched on so many aspects of Chris' life-from both a personal and

professional point of view. Of course there was a little ribbing and some talk of the golf they played together. But Tom said the most courageous hole he saw Chris play was the 18th hole of his life here on earth. That play consisted of courage, optimism and perseverance with grace, humility, a sense of humor and an absence of self-pity.

We were very proud that Joe, Mary Catherine and Johnny also spoke about their dad. They each had unique stories that related to their individual relationship with Chris. They shared lessons that they'd learned – some with humor and some very serious. They talked straight from their hearts and you could feel the love they shared and the memories they'll treasure.

Most of you probably know that in Madison, Chris' nickname was "Deck". Well, in August two new decks were christened. One was at the PSW building where funds were raised to add an outside patio area to the building. Chris had been lobbying for an outside gathering space off the board room, but when costs had gone

up the outside area was scratched. Steve Rough and Tom Temple joined forces to campaign for additional funds to make "The Deck" happen in Chris' honor. And is it beautiful! Chris would love it! Similarly at Nakoma there had been a campaign for a beautiful outdoor area. There is an area just off the pro shop that has also been christened "The Deck". Chris was aware of each of these areas being built in his honor and he thought it was the neatest thing ever! One evening he quietly said to his dad and me, "Isn't it neat? Can you believe it?"

Yes, Chris, we can believe it. You have left your mark in so many ways. You were and are a difference maker! You will be missed, but not forgotten. Never forgotten.

Happy Birthday in Heaven! It must be so beautiful! And we know the cardinals are singing!

## *Comments and Thoughts from Colleagues in Wisconsin*

I first met Chris Decker in 1991 when I was ASHP President and invited to speak at the IPA Annual Meeting. I was assigned by Tom Temple, CEO of IPA, to Chris Decker, who worked for him at the time, to serve as my host to orientate me to the meeting and meet key pharmacists. I was impressed with this young man's maturity and executive presence. A few years later, Chris arrived in Madison as the new WPhA CEO. He called me soon after he arrived to meet for dinner to get my view of the state of hospital pharmacy practice in Wisconsin and reasons why almost no hospital pharmacists belonged to WPhA, only WSHF. Over the next couple years, we met many times and attended each other's annual meetings. We began to think about the possibility of one pharmacy organization. After the annual meeting of WPhA in 1996, we met with John Bohlman, then WPhA President, and the three of us pledged that we would pursue one pharmacy organization. We formed a task force, which he asked me to chair, and we embarked on "One Voice, One Vision". We met frequently over the next 15 months culminating in both pharmacy organizations' members voting by over 90% to create the new organization. Chris and I became very close professional and social friends during this time. Chris asked that I chair the new PSW Board for the first two years and I had the honor of negotiating Chris Decker's first contract as PSW CEO. At the end of my two-year term, Chris asked that I continue to serve as his professional mentor which he called his senior advisor. I was fortunate to serve in this capacity over the next 20 years. This relationship helped both of us to become better leaders and I was able to observe the development of Chris Decker into the most successful CEO of state pharmacy organization.

**Tom Thielke, RPh**  
Consultant





## Comments and Thoughts from Colleagues in Wisconsin

I could write pages about Chris and his impact on me and our great profession, but I'll take his approach and tell you a story...

I was visiting Chris when he was in hospice and his case manager came into the room to discuss one of his medication orders. Chris' wonderful daughter, Mary Catherine, informed her dad the order was called into "that pharmacy he likes." Chris looked at the case manager, gently touched her arm and stated very clearly, without hesitation, to set the record straight, "I like ALL pharmacies." While this may seem like a trivial moment to some, it hit me directly in my heart space. This sentence summed up what Chris Decker was all about, even in his final days. He represented the interests of all pharmacies and pharmacists. He didn't let the type of pharmacy or practice setting get in the way of what was best for our profession. He understood the impact pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and student pharmacists have on patient lives and families. He was a true difference maker – one I'm honored to consider a friend – leading our profession up until his last breath. (Photo: Erika giving Chris a flu shot at the PSW office)

**Erika Horstmann, PharmD**

*Currently working at Cardinal Health on MTM, because of Chris!*



# Making a Difference: Remembering a Friend

by Tom Temple, RPh



### Editors Note:

These remarks were delivered at a luncheon celebration of Chris' life following the funeral service on August 12, 2019.

**G**ood morning. My name is Tom Temple. Chris and I had the same professional positions directing state pharmacy associations... his in Wisconsin, mine in Iowa. In that capacity, we were roommates at national pharmacy meetings, by my count some 100 times over 25 years. We were also long-time golf competitors and partners. And most important Chris is my best friend and I'm his best friend... The later I say guardedly because there's probably several of you here today who believe that you were Chris' best friend. Because, that's the way he made you feel. Deck had a God given gift to connect with people and make them feel uniquely special... When Chris loved you, you knew it. And to all who touched Chris' soul - you know exactly what I mean.

I'm here today, like you, to pray and to celebrate the life of this remarkable guy. I'm honored that the Decker family asked me to share some reflections about Chris and

to pay tribute to his incredible life. Now, I realize that the honor to speak today could have been afforded to many others... Perhaps by one of the Johnnies from Chris' college days. Or one of his Pharmacy colleagues from PSW. Or perhaps by one of his buddies at the Nakoma Golf Club. From the many many discussions I had with Chris, I know just how special he felt about all of you.... you added richness to his life. So, I'll do my best today to represent our collective love for Chris.

But before sharing those thoughts and reflections, let me acknowledge the very special strength and courage that the Decker family has shown to all of us as they supported Chris during his lengthy battle with his terrible disease. To Pat, Rick, Laura, Todd, Joe, MC and Johnny ... the spirit of grace, dignity, and love you have given to our friend is nothing short of inspiring. I know that you've been touched by the legions of people who followed Chris on CaringBridge or who paraded through the halls of Agrace Hospice. But we too have been touched by you and feel so blessed, blessed beyond any definition of reason, to have been a part of your family's journey over the past three years. You all taught us powerful lessons of faith. Thank you especially for that.

Now, I've been looking at that photo of Chris with his infectious smile. And no matter where you're sitting here today, he is smiling at you. Yes, Chris had a great smile, but boy, he could make everybody around him smile too....

I first met Chris in the late 1980's when he was a student pharmacist at the

University of Iowa. Despite being just a young kid with big nerdy glasses, I knew in an instant that I wanted him to be a part of my professional staff. Almost immediately, I could see that he had the people skills, leadership talents, and ability to get things done... that he would be a great success. He was tailor made for association work.

It took Chris almost two years on our staff, to realize that I wasn't going to pay him what he was worth; So, he decided to spread his wings, fly to Madison and assume the CEO position at the Wisconsin Pharmacy Association. As its CEO, Chris went to work to transform a faltering organization, that was at best on life support, into a vibrant, purpose filled and vision driven association, fully prepared to make a difference in the lives of its member pharmacists.

Now, I've been credited by some with serving as a mentor to Chris and helping shape his professional life... Truth be told, Chris was already shaped when I discovered his talent and knew that he was destined to do some special things for our profession. And while we enjoyed a terrific mentor-mentee relationship, Chris was every bit of a mentor to me as we carried on our collective work in pharmacy.

Over the years Chris would poke me with an observation that with one notable exception, Iowa had the most effective association in the country. And I would chide him back that he would become the most effective association executive the day I retired.... Suffice it to say, PSW today stands as the premier pharmacy association in the country. And while Chris would credit his leadership and staff as the primary reason for that, there would not be one accomplishment, not nary a one, that could have been achieved without his passionate leadership.

Now, I'll let the folks at PSW detail and chronicle the many achievements of the organization over Chris' 30-year





leadership tenure. But two deserve special mention... First, was the unification of pharmacy organizations in Wisconsin under the banner - One Voice/One Vision. That effort laid the foundation for the tremendous growth of pharmacy in this state. And second, was the creation of "Leadership Pharmacy" - now a 30 year old conference building leadership capacity in the hearts and minds of young practitioners. That too, set the stage for innovation and unparalleled success.

Now, if Chris had a professional mantra it was to encourage others to be "difference makers" and "game changers". He often cited a quote from JFK that said: "Anyone can make a difference and everyone should try"

Chris understood that real leaders don't set out to be a leader; they set out to make a difference. That it's not about the role, it's all about the goal. He also understood that there is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit.

This passionate commitment to make a difference spilled over generously in his personal life as well... One only needs to read the 87 CaringBridge posts that were created in the past three years to appreciate the character of Chris Decker.

Upon learning of his diagnosis in March of 2016, Chris immersed himself, not in a bucket list, but in making a difference for his family, friends and colleagues. He did so by striving to be "Regular Chris" ...He refused to be imprisoned by his disease... Instead, Chris used his gifts and released them to benefit others.

Throughout his battle, he showed his courage, optimism and grace like no other. His doctors said Chris was, in many ways, the most remarkable patient they'd ever seen. His bravery so stark and real that even those used to seeing people in dire circumstances, were moved by his example.

So too, many of us have been inspired by Chris' writings, his presentations and by his everyday interactions with people close to him. Chris' true character - something that was evident to many of us pre-cancer - was put on full display as he waged his fight against glioblastoma.

I believe that all of us would do well if we went back and re-read his CaringBridge posts. In short, that is where Chris wrote

the final chapter of his own life story and revealed important lessons for us to consider, as we carry on in our own lives.

Chris spoke to us about faith and hope; of gratitude and kindness; of embracing challenge and committing to fight; of accepting loss and picking yourself up like a champion; of appreciating the simpleness of sunshine, and making your own sunshine on cloudy days. And of optimism and passion to make a difference for others. These lessons made up Chris' brand and served as his trademark.

Now, the way I see it, Chris was just too...

He was too deliberate in his golf game. (He'd take forever to line up a putt).

He possessed too many pairs of shoes (I swear, Chris showed up at every national meeting with a new pair of shoes).

He was also too good at picking out a great spot for dinner and selecting a good bottle of wine for the table.

And if possible, he was too kind to others, laughed too much, and wore too big a smile.

Most irritating of all, in the end, cancer won because Chris was just too human.

Yes, cancer took our friend too soon. But while battling his disease, Chris was able to find the fun moments, not only for himself but for those of us around him. Together we all had some awesome moments...road trips, baseball games, tailgates, golf outings, terrific dinners, ice fishing, deer hunting and poking fun at each other...they were moments that truly took our breath away.

So now, to close this eulogy... As many of you know Chris and I played a lot of golf. Some of our members may have thought we played too much golf, but that's not really open for debate. Together, we competed in more than 30 Member-Guest tournaments at his club and mine. And we were fortunate to have played some of the most iconic golf courses in the country. Perhaps most memorable to me were the 5 times we walked the



fairways along Lake Michigan at Whistling Straights. That's an awesome memory that I'll cherish forever! But the most courageous hole that I ever saw Chris play was the 18th hole of his life here on earth. That play, consisted of courage, optimism and perseverance. The sheer grace of that 18th hole, the humility, the sense of humor, and the absence of self-pity was truly inspirational.

So now, I picture Chris at the 19th hole, somewhere heavenly...He's at a table with three of his buddies - Luke Osterhaus, Jerry Karbeling and Tim Webster - all three of whom, like Chris, passed on too early in their lives. Chris has ordered the hors d'oeuvres and beverages like he always has and is filling the table with unabashed laughter like he always did.

What an extraordinary life...

What an extraordinary friend...

What an incredible man.

Chris - we wish you God speed. Your life with us was well played... simply put, you made a difference. You're in God's arms now. May God be as good to you as you have been to all of us.

---

Tom Temple is the emeritus Executive Vice President and CEO of the Iowa Pharmacy Association.



# APhA

Improving medication use.  
Advancing patient care.

October 30, 2019

To Chris Decker's family, friends and colleagues,

It was a joy to work with Chris Decker for over 30 years – beginning with his early days at the Iowa Pharmacy Association (IPA) to his leadership roles in Wisconsin and nationally. When I attended Chris Decker's celebration of life in Madison, I was moved by so many expressions of positivity, but perhaps none more on point than this: "Heaven got a good one today!" The outpouring of love and gratitude for his life wasn't surprising, but it WAS impactful to all. The legacy Chris left us is one of unity within pharmacy, mentorship of his children, and his profession. Chris was a grateful servant leader. During his illness he infected all with whom he came into contact with his positivity and drive to make a difference.

I first met Chris when he was a staffer with Tom Temple in Iowa. The Iowa Pharmacy Association experience can claim some credit for Chris' contributions, and the friendly collaboration/competition between Iowa and Wisconsin was fun for all of us to see. Chris' contributions to national pharmacy were many as he led the unification of organizations in his state as an example for all.

On behalf of the leadership and staff at APhA, we share our gratitude for Chris' life, and our prayers that his family and friends find solace in knowing his was a life well lived.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Menighan, BSP Pharm, MBA, ScD (Hon.), FAPhA

Executive Vice President & CEO, American Pharmacists Association





August 2, 2019

On behalf of the ASHP Board of Directors and staff, our condolences go out to you on the passing of Chris Decker. You have lost a remarkable member of the PSW family and we all in pharmacy have lost an exceptional leader. I know that you will remember the professional accomplishments, joy, and life experiences that you shared with Chris over the years.

Chris Decker was a trusted friend and colleague that did much to advance pharmacy practice and create positive change in Wisconsin and nationally across all segments of our profession. He was an innovative, passionate, and thoughtful leader who influenced many, many pharmacists and future pharmacy leaders.

Chris truly dedicated his life to pharmacy, advocating tirelessly on behalf of PSW and its members, bringing pharmacists from diverse backgrounds and various levels of experience into leadership roles, and building an exemplary culture for Wisconsin pharmacy. He led the PSW team to achieve a number of major accomplishments, such as being the first state pharmacy association to receive a \$4 million grant from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, which catalyzed the Wisconsin Pharmacy Quality Collaborative. This is just one example of how Chris set out to truly make a difference for the profession, members of PSW and the patients they serve.

The breadth and depth of Chris' legacy is great and the people he has influenced throughout the course of his career will all carry it forward long into the future. His memory will live on through PSW and all of your ongoing work.

Sincerely,  
Paul Abramowitz, PharmD, ScD (Hon), FASHP  
CEO, American Society of Health-System Pharmacists



November 1, 2019

The National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations (NASPA) serves, among other things, as a support group of state pharmacy association executives. Chris Decker was an instrumental part of that support group for almost three decades, and we miss him. When you are selected to lead a state pharmacy association, there is so much that you do not know and must learn (at least it was for me!). In this position, the challenges are immense but the opportunity to make a difference is huge. It is hard work. The opportunity for networking, sharing and believing that “together, we are stronger” is why NASPA has existed for over 90 years.

It was apparent at my very first NASPA meeting in 1994 that Chris was well respected among his peers and with his infectious personality and smile, everyone wanted to be around him. Chris had the gift of being able to connect with people and make them feel uniquely special. He understood the power of networking, the importance of having fun and believed that what makes the difference, is your outlook, your perspective, and your attitude.

We all learned a lot from Chris over the years, but none so much as over the last three years. Chris’ optimism, determination, positive outlook was motivating. He motivated others to want to be better people, do more with their lives, see the silver lining and spread sunshine.

For almost three decades we counted on the magnetic presence of Chris Decker at NASPA meetings. For those of us that were privileged to know him, we will miss him. His legacy lives on through the difference he made to those around him throughout his life and the lessons he taught us all. He was truly a Difference Maker.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Snead, RPh, CAE, FAPhA

Executive Vice President and CEO, National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations





# Hard to Find the Words

by Kate Gainer, PharmD

**I**n April this year I drove to Madison, WI, a drive I had made many times. But this felt different. I was going to visit my friend and mentor, Chris Decker, who had been admitted to hospice care a few weeks earlier. I knew this would likely be the last time I saw Chris, and my heart was heavy. However, after a long visit, and no different than our other times together, I left with a smile on my face. It was a testament to how Chris lived, and how he made others feel, not only at the end of his life, but every day he lived. (09.06.64 – 07.30.19)

Chris was the EVP/CEO for the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin, my counterpart from my home state, and I from his. In March of 2016, Chris was diagnosed with stage 4 glioblastoma, an aggressive brain cancer. Chris beat the odds at every turn, and truly believed ‘The Median Isn’t the Message.’ He endured 3 brain surgeries with tumor removal, underwent chemotherapy and radiation, and for nearly one year diligently wore electric patches on his head to disrupt the tumor growth in his brain. Anyone who knows Chris, knows that he believed he would win, and he lived each and every day – not with a label or diagnosis – but with a sense of optimism that was truly contagious. He strived to be ‘regular Chris’ and made others around him feel inspired and fueled by his positivity.

Chris’ mentorship and friendship will have a lasting impact on my life, as his leadership and vision have and will continue to have an immeasurable impact on the profession of pharmacy. I’ve struggled to find the right words to talk about Chris since his death, but a few words stand out as lessons I learned from Chris that will stick me – both in pharmacy and in life.

## Where There’s a Will, There’s a Way

I heard Chris say this more times than I can count. Usually in a room with palpable

disagreement, or a sense of hopelessness. It was a simplistic way to acknowledge philosophical alignment and bring down real or perceived barriers. Chris often followed this statement with, ‘or we’ll make our own way!’ This statement jump-started major initiatives and programs, and is a way I strive to lead as well.

## Fail Forward

In my first meeting with Chris after I became the exec in Iowa, he talked about the importance of resiliency and accepting failures when in a leadership position. In this conversation he also taught me two phrases (which I’ve shamelessly stolen): ‘the critics don’t count’ and ‘fail forward.’ I learned to embrace failure and setbacks, and always take time to reflect and extract a lesson for improvement.

## What Matters Most

For nearly 10 years I had the opportunity to learn from Chris about

leadership, association work and the profession of pharmacy. Most of our conversations during the last year of Chris’ life were about family. His favorite moments and proudest achievements weren’t pharmacy related, rather related to his three children. This lesson, above all the lessons I learned from Chris, reminds me of what truly matters most.

Chris never sought credit or recognition in his work, but rather he strived to make a difference. To those who knew him, he will be remembered as THE difference maker. While there is a huge sense of loss for the pharmacy profession, the pharmacy family, Chris’ personal family and friends; when we – collectively and individually – strive to make a difference we’ll carry Chris’ legacy forward for years and years to come.

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Kate Gainer is the Executive Vice President & CEO of the Iowa Pharmacy Association.













# Building Our Tomorrow While Celebrating Our Foundation

by Steve Rough, RPh



### Editors Note:

These remarks were delivered at the PSW Building Our Tomorrow donor recognition reception and the dedication of "The Deck" at PSW headquarters on August 16, 2019.

**T**onight, we gather as a Wisconsin Pharmacy Family to honor our generous donors – our Difference Makers! We are both literally and figuratively ushering in the future with this unveiling of our beautifully remodeled headquarter building and with the dedication of "The Deck" later this evening.

I would like to begin my remarks with a few reflections about the importance of the history and the culture that we enjoy within PSW and must not take for granted, and to share a few thoughts and fond memories about my good friend and mentor, Chris Decker.

## The Importance of the 1997 Building for The Future (BFTF) Campaign

Without the Building for the Future campaign, there is no "tonight". As many of you are aware, in 1997, PSW became the first unified pharmacy association in the country. That year, the Building for the Future campaign raised \$420,000 in conjunction with the construction of our first (and current) headquarter building. That's a lot of money, especially back in 1997.

Over the past 21 years, funds raised through that campaign have supported many major practice advancement efforts,

leadership development programs, and the showcasing of practice-based research in Wisconsin. I wish to recognize and thank Jim Pogodzinski who served as the leader (and lead contributor) of that campaign, who also provided a generous contribution to this year's campaign

Over the past 21 years, PSW has built a very strong culture of excellence and leading through innovation, collaboration and mutual respect. The organization has always stood for the values of being positive, prepared, polite, present and of giving one's time to serve others. These are values that are bettered by sharing, growing and working together (which is the PSW way). And when one combines the culture and values I just described into one organization, the end result is a spirit of pride, optimism, and celebration that is quite unique to PSW.

The PSW culture has not happened by accident. It's happened due to strong leadership. In my view, this has transpired as a result of four things:

1. committed volunteer members who have stepped forward to serve to lead;
2. the recruitment and retention of high performing staff;
3. maintaining and preserving a first-class headquarter building where members and staff can work together;
4. most importantly, it was nurtured and inspired by our leader, Chris Decker.

## Reflection on Chris Decker as a Leader, Mentor and Friend

Next, I wish to reflect briefly on Chris' leadership, friendship, and mentorship before speaking specifically about the





campaign.

During Chris' first decade in Wisconsin, he transformed a struggling state pharmacy association into an organization with purpose, that valued people, and one in which members of all backgrounds aspired to serve. Since that time, he developed into (and will forever be cemented in history as) a pharmacy legend, not just in Wisconsin, but nationally. He served as an inspiration for so many people on the right way to live life and what it takes to lead. And he did this effortlessly and with a special grace that may never be matched. I know that words cannot express the positive impact he made on our profession and on so many people, but I would like to share with you my reflections on the reasons why this was so (be patient, there are 10 of them):

1. Chris made others feel valued and important. Those who were fortunate to work with Chris treasured every conversation with him. People wanted to be around him because of how he made them feel – important! In Chris' eyes, there was never any rank. His ability to connect with all people and to make them feel valued and welcomed was unmatched. He would seek out people in a crowd who looked uncomfortable, and tried to help them feel welcome, important and comfortable.
2. Chris believed in working together. He would often say that “it is up to us to work together, as this is how good things get done. It is also up to us to maintain our strong traditions and keep forging forward”. He believed that we all get to determine our attitude, and our effort. And that we can't always control what happens to us, but we can control how we respond to what happens to us. He led by example in this regard. Big effort, positive attitude, and thoughtful response were the three cornerstones of Chris' everyday repertoire.
3. Chris had high expectations. He believed that we should settle for nothing less than working collectively

to make a difference. He passed this belief on to PSW's leaders and members, making each of us feel very important and very proud in serving PSW.

4. Chris inspired others. In an unassuming and fun manner, he inspired others to do their very best, and to be the very best versions of themselves. Thus he shaped others to be better leaders, and better people.
5. Chris connected and believed in people. He inspired us to serve and give back to PSW, he connected good people with one another, and he insisted on recognizing and

“

**“It is up to us to work together, as this is how good things get done. It is also up to us to maintain our strong traditions and keep forging forward”**

**- Christopher Decker**

celebrating the success of others every chance he could.

6. Chris had perpetual optimism. He always envisioned an uplifting future. He found the opportunity in every difficulty, and found a way to do things, rather than focusing on reasons why things can't be done. He always recognized the gains that had been achieved rather than what had not been accomplished.
7. Chris focused on relationships. He was a great friend who you could count on, no matter what.
8. Chris showed gratitude. He felt leadership was a privilege and not a title. To Chris, success was everyone's business and everyone's doing. He always gave the credit for success to other people.
9. Chris always found time to celebrate. He had fun and didn't take himself too seriously. He knew when to take a break and relax and open a good bottle of wine. He made sure those

who led had a great time doing it.

10. Chris had great character. He was a gentleman. When you meet Chris' parents and sister you will see a lot of them in Chris and vice versa. They have great character. And I believe you can tell a lot about a person by the character of their kids. When you spend time with Chris' three adult children, you will discover first-hand the great character he handed down to them.

These are some of the attributes of Chris that I believe defined his leadership style, which helped shaped PSW to be the nation's finest state pharmacy organization.

There are many more, I know. Chris was the prototype role model for the type of person I want my kids to be, and I'm grateful that they (as well as my wife, Tammy) were able spend time with him too.

I think it's safe to say that none of what we are celebrating tonight would have happened without the Wisconsin Pharmacy Friendships and the spirit of purpose that developed under the leadership of Chris Decker. Most of us here

tonight have benefited greatly through the opportunities afforded to us through our association with PSW and with Chris. We were so blessed to have been touched by such an inspirational and positive person who brought people together like no other leader. We all learned a lot from his optimistic outlook and vision, and now it is our responsibility to carry his spirit forward.

And Chris loved quotes. I would like to share with you one of the quotes I heard him say at some point this past year, which I think fits him to a tee:

“Never underestimate the power of goodness, and the power of positivity. And where ever you go, go with all your heart. Be present, be positive, and give boldly.”

Please join me in raising our glasses for a toast to Chris Decker.

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Steve Rough was the Campaign Chair for the Building Our Tomorrow Campaign and is a member of the Wisconsin Pharmacy Foundation Board.





## Dedicating "The Deck"

**C**hris Decker was the CEO of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin for almost 30 years. His legacy of developing a Wisconsin Pharmacy culture of innovation, collaboration, and mutual respect supported pharmacy practice advancement in Wisconsin and beyond. We have all been touched by his story, his positivity, and his call to us to be "Difference Makers."

In collaboration with Chris' colleagues across the country, the Wisconsin Pharmacy Foundation facilitated over \$123,000 in contributions in tribute to Chris. In conjunction with this tribute, the PSW Board of Directors has resolved to dedicate a new patio space at the PSW office as "The Deck." This networking and event space, conceived through Chris' vision, now serves as a lasting place for the Wisconsin Pharmacy Family to come

together, network, mentor, collaborate, and inspire one another.

The Wisconsin Pharmacy Foundation would like to thank "Team Deck" (Tom Temple, Ron Fitzwater, Steve Mullenix, Mark Pilkington, Rod Shafer, and Becky Snead; colleagues of Chris' from across the country) and the Decker Family for their support in this special tribute to Chris Decker.

*Below: Dedication of "The Deck" during the Grand Re-Opening and Donor Recognition event on August 16, 2019 at the PSW Headquarters in Madison, WI.*





# GIVING IN TRIBUTE

Accreditation Council for  
Pharmacy Education (ACPE)  
Alabama Pharmacy Association  
Holly Altenberger  
American Society of Health-  
System Pharmacy (ASHP)  
AmerisourceBergen, Good  
Neighbor Pharmacy  
Apraxis Health Solutions  
Terry Audley  
Brienne Bakken  
Christopher Barron  
David Bauer  
Dale & Jillian Beaty  
Tim & Sherry Becker  
Clyde Birringer  
Emily Bollom  
Eric & Dana Borgerding  
Larry & Carol Braden  
Thomas & Carol Breuch  
Barry Brewer  
Anne Burns  
Rex Catton  
Joe Cesarz  
Thomas R. Clark  
Nancy Coatney  
Jordan & Jana Cohen  
Harles & Judith Cone  
Joni Cover  
Laura Cranston  
Bernard & Cherie Cremers  
Jay & Ann Currie  
Anne Daniels  
Larry & Trudy Decker  
Sarah Derr  
David Duehring  
Bill Eley  
Deb & Jerry Enochson  
Patricia Epple - PPA  
Michelle Farrell  
James R. Fenno & the Past  
Presidents  
Steve & Jean Firman  
Janet Fritsch  
Kate Gainer  
Mike & Debbie Gillard  
Mark Glasper  
Robert & Cheryl Greenwood  
Justin Guthman

Bill Hamik  
Ed Heckman & PAAS National  
Martin & Anna Herrmann  
Edward & Pam Hesterlee  
Douglas Hoey  
Erika Horstmann  
Carole Huhn  
Independent Pharmacy  
Cooperative (IPC)  
Indiana Pharmacists Association  
Iowa Pharmacy Association  
Stephen & Vickie Jacobs  
Russ Jensen  
Kristi Johnson in memory of Curt  
Johnson  
TJ Johnsrud  
Jane Jones  
Ronald & Karen Jordan  
Roderick Jorgenson & Connie  
Peterson  
Joseph Kachelski  
Gary & Marie Kadlec  
Dory Klein  
Susan Kleppin  
Chris Klink  
Anne Marie (Sesti) Kondic  
Julie & Roger Kuhle  
Lindsey & Nick Ladell  
Lakeview Pharmacy - Racine  
John Laughrey  
Dean Donald & Louise Letendre,  
UI College of Pharmacy Family  
Littler Mendelson, PC  
Shane Madsen  
Lynnae & Kevin Mahaney  
Lucinda Maine - AACP  
Dianne Malburg - Michigan  
Pharmacists Association  
Beth & Mike Martin  
Dale Masten  
Forbes McIntosh  
Michael & Cynthia McKenna  
McKesson Corporation  
McKernan Family  
Thomas E. Menighan  
Michigan Pharmacists  
Association  
James Miller  
Randolph Miller  
Marsha Millonig

Minnesota Society of Health-  
System Pharmacists  
Minnesota Pharmacists  
Association  
Mississippi Society of Hospital  
Pharmacists  
Stephen Mullenix  
Rhonda Mullin  
Randall S. Myers & Deirdre L.  
Myers  
National Alliance of State  
Pharmacy Associations (NASPA)  
National Association of Boards  
of Pharmacy Foundation  
(NABPF)  
National Association of Chain  
Drug Stores (NACDS)  
National Community  
Pharmacists Association (NCPA)  
National Council for Prescription  
Drug Program (NCPDP)  
Garret & Erin Newkirk  
George L. Oestreich  
Leman & Tana Olson  
James & Katharine Opt  
Matthew & Marilyn Osterhaus  
Robert Osterhaus  
Andy & Rhonda Peterson  
Pharmacists Mutual Insurance  
Company  
Mark Pilkington  
Pam Ploetz  
John & Rose Poels  
Andrea Porter  
Kurt Proctor  
Anthony Pudlo  
Mike & Terry Pursel  
Christopher Queram  
Lynne Quissell  
Sarah Ray  
Mary & Jay Rice  
Douglas Rogers  
Rosalind Franklin University of  
Medicine and Science College of  
Pharmacy  
Jon Roth  
Steve Rough & Tammy Foster  
Xin Ruppel  
Partnership of Safe Medicines  
Ken Schaefer  
Douglas Schara  
William Schimmel

Samuel & Jacqueline Schmidt  
Jim & Nancy Scott  
Jay & Katie Sekelsky  
James & Elizabeth Severance  
Nikita Shah  
Kathleen Skibinski  
David & Lori Sladky  
Charlotte Smith  
Richard Smith  
Rob & Becky Snead  
Bernard & Nancy Sorofman  
Sarah & Matt Sorum  
Cynthia Steffen  
Sheryl Steinhauer  
Kathy Steinocher  
Jerald Sveum  
Tom & Cathy Temple  
Tom Temple Consulting  
Tennessee Pharmacists  
Association  
Thomas Thielke  
Brad & Angela Tice  
Theresa Tolle  
Farah Towfic  
Ray Townsend & Jane Osterhaus  
Kari & Philip Trapskin  
Rick & Debra Vanden Heuvel  
Michelle Vetterkind  
Peter Vlasses  
Tim & Sally Vordenbaumen  
Susan Vrabec  
Larry Wagenknecht  
James Wallace  
Washington State Pharmacy  
Association  
Krystalyn Weaver  
Aaron & Jodie Webb  
Julie & Ed Webb  
Douglas & Kathryn Wetrich  
Richard & Kim Willis  
Bill Wimmer  
Wisconsin Bankers Association  
Wisconsin Hospital Association  
Women's International Pharmacy  
Phillip Marcus Woodward  
Laurie Wurster  
Ed Yorty & Tammy Bower-Yorty  
Emily Zadovorny

# Supporting Volunteers Ready to Make a Difference

by Sarah Sorum, PharmD



### Editors Note:

The following remarks were delivered by PSW Interim CEO Sarah Sorum at the Past Presidents' Dinner in conjunction with the PSW Annual Meeting on Thursday, September 12, 2019.

**G**ood evening! What a group! Thank you for being here tonight. My name is Sarah Sorum and I am currently serving as your Interim CEO for PSW. It's special to be in this place tonight; special because of those who are here with us but, in particular, it's special for me to be with you in this historic hotel – Hotel Northland – in downtown Green Bay. It is just a few blocks from here that my Grandma Rose's family owned a pharmacy until 1980 – Holzer Corner Drug. They were known for their pie, date bars, and for serving Packers. It's also where my grandparents met. With that family history so near, I'm humbled to be standing up here tonight, almost 40 years later, speaking to friends as we celebrate leading pharmacy practice in Wisconsin.

I'd like to acknowledge the past presidents of WPhA, WSHP, and PSW that are here tonight. Would you please stand to be recognized? I want to especially thank one of our past presidents, Jeff Kirchner, and his wife Lori who are here tonight. Lori and Jeff are co-owners of Streu's Pharmacy just a few blocks from here. They scoped out our venue a year ago. I think you did a great job! What a neat spot!

I'd like to acknowledge the members of the Wisconsin Pharmacy Foundation Board who are here tonight. Would you please stand to be recognized? I'd like to acknowledge the members of the PSW Board if Directors who are here tonight. Would you please stand to be recognized? Additionally, I'd like to acknowledge the 2019 PSW awards recipients who are here tonight. We'll look forward to celebrating all of you on Saturday night, but would you please stand to be recognized?

There is one person who is notably not

here in person, but he is absolutely here in spirit tonight – Chris Decker. Chris loved this dinner. He loved celebrating with pharmacy friends and honoring the leaders of our organization, both past and present. I can just see him in front of this group with a big smile and thanking all of you...

On behalf of the PSW staff, I'd like to thank you for the truly humbling outpouring of support you've provided to our PSW team and Chris' family. The stories, notes, and hugs have been amazing. Thank you.

While it might feel like a natural time to make a toast to Chris, we have a tradition within PSW and I want to be sure we carry that tradition forward tonight. Please raise your glass. To PSW President Matt Mabie, for his service to the organization and to all the volunteers who tirelessly serve PSW. Matt, thank you for your leadership and your efforts on behalf of our members and Wisconsin Pharmacy. Cheers!

It was about a month ago that a few members of our staff and our current presidential officers attended the PSW Leadership Pharmacy Conference. Many of you have been to this conference which is hosted each year with the Iowa Pharmacy Association for 20 Wisconsin and Iowa pharmacists in their first 15 years of practice. It's a conference Chris started as a staff member at IPA and then brought to Wisconsin. Many of you have attended. A few years ago, we started a "W.O.W." session at that conference where PSW and IPA officers and CEOs share their "Words of Wisdom" (W.O.W.) with the participants. We recorded Chris' last year and I pulled it out and was listening to it this week. In the recording, Chris describes the early days of his time with WPhA and

his work with WSHP.

"We didn't have any money, but what we had as our strongest asset was our great people – the power of volunteers. People ready to make a difference and who knew what was possible and wanted to work to make it so."

Well, the power of these people – YOU – is amazing.

In celebration of that volunteer power, we brought some pictures to showcase the recently finished remodel of the PSW headquarters building in Madison. This remodel will serve PSW and its members long into the future. Please visit any time. We're already making the building work harder for you, offering video conferencing, hosting networking events, and bringing staff together to work in new ways.

In conjunction with the grand re-opening of the building, we celebrated the close of the Wisconsin Pharmacy Foundation's Building Our Tomorrow campaign. Under the leadership of Steve Rough as our campaign chairman, the Foundation raised over \$500,000 in pledges and gifts to strengthen the Foundation and Wisconsin Pharmacy now and in the future. Steve, please stand so we can recognize you. Thank you for your leadership! And, thank you to the many, many of you who designated a gift for that exciting campaign.

As the building renovations neared completion, the Foundation Board approached the PSW Board of Directors about the construction of an outdoor patio and networking space – a space Chris was passionate about creating – to be dedicated in tribute to Chris' service to Wisconsin Pharmacy. On August 16, 2019 we dedicated "The Deck" in Chris' honor. It's a special spot and all are welcome to sit,



reflect, laugh, and enjoy some sunshine.

So, we have lots to celebrate tonight. We want you to share stories at your tables and remember Chris tonight. There is no program; we'll save the formal, live tribute to Chris for Saturday morning and we will have a print tribute to share with all of you that will be done prior to year-end.

I'll close with the following...let's continue building the future while remembering Chris' legacy.

Thank you and have a wonderful evening.

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Sarah Sorum is the Interim Executive Vice President & CEO at the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin in Madison, WI.

**Right:** Sarah Sorum visits Chris at Agrace Hospice in Fitchburg during his stay.



## *Comments and Thoughts from Colleagues in Wisconsin*

I feel so blessed to have the best Chris story. I met Chris in 1997, during the Grand Opening of the PSW building. It was an exciting time for pharmacy but I was a petrified small town girl who had just started pharmacy school and just hoped I would make it. Little did I know on that evening, I would meet so many people who would have an impact on my career. At the center of it all was Chris Decker--he had an amazing way of creating linkages and inspiring individuals to surpass their limits.

Also, little did I know 20 years later he'd be an important point of support as we realized our battles with cancer. I was diagnosed a few months after being elected President of PSW. This was a few months prior to his diagnosis. When I first told him the news, his first words were, "We will get through this together." So reassuring, so kind, yet confident and I am so thankful he was a part of my pharmacy family. (Photo: Chris and Michelle at the 2017 PSW Annual Meeting)

**Michelle Farrell, PharmD, BCACP**  
Owner, Boscobel Pharmacy



# Remembering a Difference Maker, Leaving a Legacy: A Tribute to Chris Decker

by John Sutter, RPh, Sue Sutter, RPh



### Editors Note:

These remarks were delivered as part of a general session tribute during the PSW Annual Meeting in Green Bay on September 14, 2019.

## Words from John Sutter

Sue and I are honored to be asked to provide a few comments this morning, and yes, our professional careers overlapped with those years Chris Decker served our organization so ably. Our successes and satisfaction in our accomplishments were greatly influenced by Chris and the other difference makers we encountered. As Matt mentioned, our presence here today is not only as Chris' professional colleagues, but as dear friends.

Perhaps you'll allow us to illustrate the type of friendships Chris formed; to borrow a quote from Tom Temple, long-time executive director of the Iowa Pharmacy Association, friend and mentor to Chris, Tom said, "Chris was my best friend and I knew I was his best friend, but Chris also had the unique gift of making everyone feel like you were his best friend!" I sense Chris' warm, knowing spirit here in this room right now. We hope our thoughts:

- Re-ignite some of your memories of Chris
- Give you a glimpse into the person Chris was
- Inspire you to be an active part in forwarding the vision of Wisconsin Pharmacy because Chris was all about that

Importantly, this tribute for Chris should not be about Chris alone; he would not want it to be. He would want us to recognize all those individuals and organizations who stood with him to advance Wisconsin pharmacy practice.

Let's talk about some organizational history & achievements and how Chris' style and grace were on display. When Chris arrived on the scene in 1990, our organization (WPhA at that time), had many capable volunteer leaders but we

needed a spark, a catalyst for new direction; and we found him; nearly straight out of the classroom!

Kind of like that organic chemistry experiment; where not only the right ingredients have to be present but the right ingredients in the right proportions with the right catalyst. Chris made you want to be part of the mixture. A couple notes: First, Chris would be the first to admit that he'd forgot all that chemistry stuff long ago and second, the aforementioned mixture could very well be equal parts good food and red wine. But I digress.... We could share a laundry list of past PSW important initiatives but we'll highlight a few.

In my humble opinion, the pattern illustrated is an ever-rising trajectory of accomplishment and innovation fostered by a culture of collective & cooperative action which Chris championed. The Young Pharmacists Leadership Conference was actually an effort initiated by Chris while he worked for the Iowa Pharmacy Association. His vision and hard work have enabled dozens of young pharmacists to experience a program to jump start their leadership development. Again, Chris' style engaged others to maximize their impact; he was a believer in the "Strengths Finder" concept. The Young Pharmacists Leadership Conference is an opportunity for young pharmacists to reflect on their unique strengths and leadership potential and to be around other participants seeking new avenues to make a difference as Chris so encouraged.

The Building for the Future campaign in the mid-90s highlights Chris' ability to turn an organizational need into a burning desire to accomplish something. Chris displayed great talent as a fundraiser; be it personal contacts or corporate ones. I

admire that ability. Of course, I'd be the first to say this organization's strength is first about our people – but it also matters having a first-rate physical facility both for our hardworking staff and to project a strong public image. And these past three years we've succeeded again in our facility upgrades.

I continue to be personally heartened by the memory of my work on the One Voice One Vision committee. I observed first-hand a willingness of a wide range of individuals to open our thinking and do the right thing. Chris was both good counsel and also a proven leader and the OVOV committee members ultimately closed ranks around him. And thus, the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin was formed, a first for the country actually, having engaged the interests of all the pharmacy stakeholders of our state.

And finally, I'd like to share another fact of life for the leadership of PSW over the years relating to Chris' long tenure as executive director. Chris' talents were being noticed by many on both the state and national stage. Those of us that served in leadership roles worried that Chris could very well receive attractive job offers; but Chris, though ambitious did not jump ship; he so valued the partnerships he'd formed, believed the work ahead of us in Wisconsin was significant and energizing and simply loved the friendships here. He remained loyal to Wisconsin Pharmacy. So, fortunately for Wisconsin and particularly for the PSW leadership team and staff, we had Chris around for almost 30 years!

Now, returning to the timeline of Chris' tenure, I'd like to turn the mic over to Sue for comments relating to her work with Chris as she entered leadership roles on the Board of Pharmacy and PSW.



## Words from Sue Sutter

As an association executive, Chris nurtured the PSW volunteer leadership to develop a vision for the organization that they believed in. He had the unique skill of getting members and staff alike to work hard to achieve goals that come from a unified vision. When we look at the countless initiatives PSW has taken on during these years to fulfill our vision, a couple stand out for me because they truly took this ability of his to encourage people to move forward and have people want to be part of it.

So, one part of the vision - being a unified voice of Wisconsin Pharmacy, and specifically legislative advocacy for the profession, I often found myself encouraged to participate in that arena during my years on the Board of Pharmacy and later in the leadership at PSW. I know many pharmacists were encouraged and asked to do the same. Chris had a way of realizing when someone had a passion for the profession and then he'd figure out how to encourage that person to put their passion into action.

In my case, I ended up doing public speaking I would have never imagined (and which really doesn't come naturally to me) but I'm sure there are many others that can attest to this, but Chris didn't just ask you and then push you out there. He and his staff were there for whatever was needed.

My most memorable public speaking event was in 2006 when Senator Herb Kohl requested of PSW that a Wisconsin community pharmacist testify at a US Senate hearing about the challenges during the implementation of the Part D benefit; and there were plenty. Chris asked and I said yes. Believe me, he earned his salary helping me with my testimony.

We wrote and I practiced...and practiced. I even had him on the phone on a Sunday afternoon working to make sure my testimony stayed in the time limit allowed, not to mention the prep work on what questions I might be asked. The bottom line was; he was there for me.

This memory came to mind when Sarah Sorum asked if we would speak today, and I thought to myself and chuckled, "really Chris, one more time, public speaking for you, but it fit the criteria and I am passionate about his legacy here at PSW



and so I've practiced...and practiced... and I felt he's been listening.

The other standout initiative for myself and I'm sure most of you, is the Wisconsin Pharmacy Quality Collaborative (WPQC). This initiative addresses every aspect of the PSW vision. I believe what he loved about WPQC is that it was an initiative that really was making a difference at every level of involvement. The WPQC staff could see they were helping pharmacists change their practices, and likewise pharmacists were making new impacts on patients' use of medications and their health. He loved hearing pharmacists tell stories about how their WPQC training had made a difference in how they approached their day-to-day practice. Whether it was catching a pediatric dosing error, or the completion of a comprehensive medication review (CMR) that simplified a patient's medication regimen, he loved to retell these stories over the years. We pharmacists were making a difference and thus he had made a difference.

With Chris' leadership of both an outstanding staff and volunteer members that were willing to donate hundreds of hours to the success of WPQC, together we have strived hard to put into practice what pharmacists have been envisioning for almost 30 years.

We know Chris was not all work though. He worked hard and played hard. As John mentioned, Chris loved fine wine and good food, and of course, golf. I'm sure some of you had a chance to learn some of the lessons he'd share while doing these activities. The first, while dining, is the challenge of which bread plate is yours...on your left or right? Chris was always ready with his visual "b" on the left for bread, and

"d" on the right for drinks. Next time you are in that situation, you can remember Chris. He would like that.

Chris was an excellent golfer, but even he felt challenged by the game once in a while. I heard him numerous times over the years, when he was doing his practice swings on a chip shot say, "let the club do the work, let the club do the work." And so, the next time you are approaching that chip shot, "let the club do the work" and remember Chris. He would like that.

Chris liked to use the quote, "Success begets success." In the 1990s, it was things like PharmCare, the Medicaid Reimbursement Project, the new headquarters, OVOV, and supporting expanded residency opportunities. Into the new century, it was a transformation of the PSW journal, WPQC and the list goes on. As you can see, we could continue to recount great memories and accomplishments. I hope you all have special thoughts you will cherish about Chris.

You may have read Chris' parents last post on CaringBridge. They closed their loving, touching, heartfelt remarks with this special one; "Chris, you have left your mark in so many ways. You were and are a difference marker! You will be missed, but not forgotten. Never forgotten."

Let us join together to honor Chris' legacy and leadership of PSW by committing to be DIFFERENCE MAKERS!

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John and Sue Sutter were owners of Marshland Pharmacies in Dodge County, WI and are now retired. John Sutter served as president of WPhA from 1996-1997 and Sue Sutter served as president of PSW from 2006-2007.





## Comments and Thoughts from Colleagues in Wisconsin

Outside of my professors Chris Decker was the first pharmacist I met after I started pharmacy school. I was instantly struck by his warmth and sincerity. I had an understanding that my career in pharmacy was going to be rewarding from a patient interaction perspective, but Chris challenged me to see the profession as more than that. He opened my eyes to the idea that the healthcare world was changing and our profession had to change with it. The trick was how our profession will adapt while still staying connected to our rich history. Chris simply told me we need people to lead and asked am I going to be one of those people. Chris had a way of making some of the most innocent comments stick with you and inspire you to do more.

I was a 3rd year pharmacy student at the APhA annual meeting in Philadelphia. I was sitting at a table with a group of student colleagues from other schools at the Friday night student social event. Chris walked up to our table with an arm full of drinks, gave them to us and said "Here's to the future leaders of pharmacy from your friends at PSW. Keep doing what you are doing." The students from the other states were amazed at the relationships that were created between pharmacists in our state. Chris helped foster that culture and it was at that moment I decided I wanted to be part of continuing and growing the Wisconsin pharmacy culture.

Fast forward to the picture above. This was August of 2016, 5 months after Chris' GBM diagnosis. We are at the PSW Annual Meeting in the Dells and I was about to be sworn in as President Elect. I would not have been there if it were not for Chris. I am thankful everyday on the impact he has had on my life.

(Photo: Chris and Nick pose for a "selfie" with the Executive Committee at the 2015 PSW Annual Meeting)



**Nicholas Olson, PharmD, PharmD, BCACP, AAHIVP**  
 Manager Ambulatory Pharmacy, Froedtert Health



