

Keeping People Connected

DeFries playing key role in Washburn Law's growth.

By Angela Lutz

As a student at Washburn University School of Law 40 years ago, **Lucky DeFries, '78**, made the connection that would chart the course of his professional career. At that time, DeFries learned that **Jim Slattery, '75**, then a Kansas Representative and Speaker Pro Tem of the Kansas House, could use an intern. This development kick-started a lifelong friendship with Slattery, and shortly after graduation, Slattery asked DeFries if he would like to work for the Kansas Department of Revenue legal staff. Having taken the state and local tax course at Washburn, DeFries was eager to accept the position.

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"That's one of the benefits we have with Washburn, those opportunities for internships with state government and other connections," DeFries said. "That's what catapulted me into the career that I've had, and it's been very satisfying and enjoyable."

Because of his appreciation for the education and opportunities he earned at Washburn, DeFries and his wife, Pam, have committed \$50,000 toward the law school's building campaign.

The donations will help fund a new state-of-the-art facility to encourage collaboration between faculty and students, utilize the latest technology, and continue to provide the top-notch legal education students have been receiving at Washburn for more than a century.

"If you look at all the different programs we have and how highly we are rated nationally, we need to have a facility that's consistent with the quality of the education that's being provided and the quality of the staff and professors," DeFries said. "That will certainly provide some new energy, too, to have a new state-of-the-art facility. It will be very attractive as we're trying to recruit new students and will be very good for our staff and faculty in terms of the things they'll have access to."

DeFries is poised to play an instrumental role in the law school's growth going forward, as he recently assumed the position of chair of the board of governors, succeeding Slattery, his friend and mentor. Honored and humbled by his selection as chair, DeFries is looking forward to working on several new initiatives with Dean Carla Pratt, who took the helm earlier this year. This includes a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation, a charitable organization that benefits residents of Northwest Kansas.

"I'm excited about the progress we've made with the Dane Hansen Foundation and the ability to match up some of our graduates with areas that are really underserved," DeFries said. "We need to find some of our good graduates who are willing to go into these communities, and that program is one that we will be able to expand upon. I think everybody is excited about some of the potential that exists there."

DeFries has also remained connected to his Washburn roots as an adjunct professor at the law school, where he has co-taught a state and local tax class since 1993. DeFries noted that Washburn has been able to attract and retain a quality faculty



Lucky, '78, and Pam DeFries. Photo by Nick Krug

– in fact, he can name two current professors who taught him in the '70s, **Linda Elrod, BA '69, JD '72**, and Jim Concannon. As chair of the board of governors, DeFries aims to find more ways to keep alumni involved with the law school through networking and career advancement opportunities.

“We don’t want people to drift away after they graduate; we want them to stay connected to the law school,” DeFries said. “We’re always looking for ways we can better connect with students after they graduate and provide opportunities for them to continue to participate.”

According to DeFries, one way for alumni to remain involved with Washburn is to give to the building fund and help the law school replace its current 50-year-old facility, which was constructed following the tornado in 1966. The building has

undergone a number of additions and renovations since it was built, but the most cost-effective way to provide for the students of the future is to build a new facility. As an adjunct professor at the law school, DeFries has had the opportunity to work with a host of talented students, and he believes it is critical to provide these “sharp young folks” every opportunity to help expand upon Washburn’s legacy.

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