

# Smooth transition seen for parks

Rockford leaders say Webbs Norman prepared his staff, including interim chief Tim Dimke, well for the time when he'd retire.

By Corina Curry  
ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

ROCKFORD — They came in droves Thursday morning for the official announcement of Webbs Norman's retirement, bringing ample amounts of praise for the Rockford Park District's longtime leader and confidence in the district's future.

Dozens of business and government leaders, directors of local agencies, politicians and community activists packed into the lobby of the Rockford Park District headquarters downtown to congratulate Norman on his decision to step down after 34 years as the district's executive director.

It wasn't long before this hodgepodge gathering of Rockford's elite were on their feet giving Norman a standing ovation for his decades of service and friendship to the Rockford community.

As folks who work closely with the Park District and rely on Norman to make their good ideas better, most said they have no worries about Norman's move from executive director to volunteer historian and fundraiser.

If the lifelong parks and recreation administrator knew how to do something better than everyone else, it was being a mentor and passing along all that he knew to those around him.

Tim Dimke is a perfect example, they said.

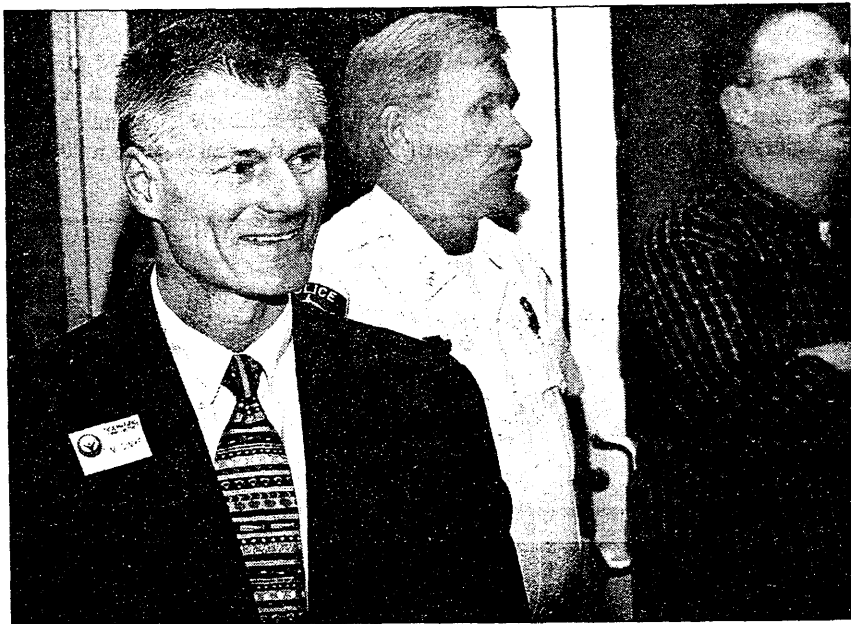
Dimke, who will serve as interim director after Norman's retirement June 1, long has been seen as Norman's protégé and a likely and capable successor.

"Webbs has done his part in being a good leader and leaving his staff prepared to go on without him," said Rockford Art Museum Director Linda Dennis. "And Tim is wonderful. He's earned the respect of the community. He's also been there for so many years."

"The city has a very good working relationship with Webbs and with Tim Dimke," City Administrator Jim Ryan said. "He shares many of the same qualities as Webbs. And it's not just Tim. There are a lot of tremendous people over there that have been brought up through the organization by Webbs. ... I have no doubt that we will continue to have an excellent park system here in Rockford after Webbs retires."

Dimke doesn't intend to waste any time continuing Norman's legacy.

As he awaits the park board's decision on whether he'll permanently take over the reins of the district or step aside for another candidate, Dimke said he's got at least three major objectives: keep everything running smoothly through the district's busy



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Tim Dimke listens as Rockford Park District Director Webbs Norman shares highlights of his career during the formal announcement Thursday of his retirement. Dimke will lead the district until a permanent director is hired.

## Profile: Webbs Norman

**Age:** 73

**Hometown:** Chattanooga, Tenn.

**Family:** Married, four children, two grandchildren

**Education:** Morrison High School, 1952; University of Illinois, bachelor's degree in secondary education, 1957; University of Illinois, master's degree in park and recreation administration, 1960

**Professional experience:**

National Recreation Association Internship Program, Department of Municipal Recreation and Adult Education, Milwaukee, September 1957 to May 1958; superintendent of Recreation, Moline, May to December 1958; supervisor of fieldwork students and research assistant, University of Illinois, Department of Municipal Recreation and Park Administration, December 1958 to June 1960; director of Parks and Recreation and junior high teacher with Charleston public schools, June 1960 to March 1961; director, Westchester Park District, March 1961 to March 1962; supervisor of special facilities, Oak Park Park District, March 1962 to January 1965; director, Oak Park Park District, February 1965 to December 1968; consulting director, Park Ridge Park District, January 1969 to January 1970; consulting director, Niles Park District, January 1970 to January 1971; executive direc-



## Profile: Tim Dimke

**Age:** 51

**Hometown:** Rockford

**Family:** Married, one child

**Education:** Auburn High School, 1973; bachelor's degree in park and recreation administration, Eastern Illinois University, 1977; master's in business administration, Rockford College, 1990

**Professional experience** (all with the Rockford Park District):

Seasonal maintenance staff at Anna Page and Searls parks, 1973-76; winter activity staff, January 1977; seasonal general maintenance staff, 1977; general maintenance crew foreman, August 1977 to May 1978; support services manager, May 1978 to March 1980; seasonal pool supervisor, March-August 1980; assistant manager at Riverview Ice House, August 1980 to September 1981; manager at Riverview Ice House, September 1981 to April 1985; superintendent of special facilities, April 1985 to April 1989; deputy director of recreation, April 1989 to November 1998; interim executive director, November 1998 to February 1999; deputy director of recreation, February 1999 to February 2000; deputy director, chief operating officer, February to December 2000; chief operating officer, since December 2000

**Groups and associations:** Rockford College Board of Counselors, Rockford College MBA advisory committee, Luther Academy playground development committee, Luther Academy volunteer football coach, Rockford Raptors volunteer soccer coach, Rockford School District strategic planning committee, Rockford Renaissance Education Foundation advisory council

tor, Rockford Park District, since March 1972; anticipated retirement date: June 1

summer, begin assessment of the district's 2004-06 three-year plan and development of a 2007-09 plan, and work to become one of 30 accredited park districts in Illinois.

The accreditation process will take about a year, Dimke said, and will force the district to examine and re-examine its practices.

"It's costly in terms of labor, but the return on the investment well exceeds it," he said. "Just going through the

documentation forces you to really analyze what you do."

The five-member park board has hired Ted Flickenger of the Illinois Association of Park Districts to help it find Norman's replacement. For \$1,400, Flickenger will conduct a community assessment this summer, asking leaders, residents and program participants what qualities they are looking for in their next parks leader.

The board hopes to review

the assessment in September and determine its next step at that time.

Staff writer Corina Curry can be reached at 815-987-1395 or ccurry@rrstar.com.