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### Local News

   
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## Man gets degree at age 81

By [SUSAN FIELD](#)

Clare Managing Editor



Patrick Hackett joined the ranks of his wife and seven daughters Saturday when he earned a bachelor's degree.

Hackett, 81, a retired attorney who was raised in Mt. Pleasant and now lives in Brighton, finally took his walk, clad in cap and gown, at Rose Arena, 64 years after enrolling at Central Michigan University.

had always itched to finish his undergraduate degree.

“There was a hole in my resume that will be filled tonight,” Hackett said Saturday prior to the 5 p.m. commencement ceremony.

Hackett, who graduated from Sacred Heart Academy in Mt. Pleasant, began taking classes at CMU in 1943, but his education was cut short by a call to duty.

Hackett earned a juris doctorate at the University of Detroit College of Law in 1950, before law schools required bachelor's degrees for admittance. He

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Although he tried to enlist in the military that same year, his father would not sign the paperwork needed for the then 17-year-old to be allowed to join the Navy.

TOP RENTALS

A year later, Hackett was drafted and served in the South Pacific during World War II.

When he left the service, he returned to CMU, taking classes in 1946 and 1947, but left without a degree when he enrolled in law school. Hackett became a general attorney for Conrail and the Penn Central Transportation Company, and assistant attorney general for the New York Central Railroad.

His 49-year legal career also included work as a railroad legal advisor, a trial attorney and a public educator.

Many of Hackett's family members earned degrees at CMU – his mother received her teaching certificate from CMU's predecessor, the Mt. Pleasant Normal School, in 1905 – and he wanted to follow suit.

There were hesitations, however, but Hackett's student advisor, Melissa Rensi, urged him to get the degree he had missed for so many years. "She was just wonderful," Hackett said. "At one point, I said 'I don't want to do this, I'll be too old.' She walked me through it."

After enrolling in CMU's off-campus program, Hackett's combined 80 credits from law school and 85 credits earned at CMU got him his bachelor of science degree in community development.

Hackett and wife Barbara, a retired U.S. District judge who served the Eastern Michigan district, inspired five of their daughters to become attorneys as well – although they earned their bachelor's degrees first. Daughter Carol Garagiola is a probate judge in Livingston County; Meg Hackett and Patricia Hackett are also lawyers.

"The others are great, too," Hackett joked.

Beth Hackett is a professor of women's studies at Agnes Scott College; Sarah Hackett is a graduate of Georgetown University; Lynn Hackett is a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Sue Delonis attended Georgetown and graduated from the University of Michigan.

Three of Hackett's grandsons are also attorneys.

Hackett's family planned to celebrate his graduation with a brunch today hosted by Carol and Steve Garagiola.

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