

'I had to try'

MCC alumnus says **lessons** learned 50 years ago at MCC have been **critical** throughout his life



Montcalm Community College alumnus Mark F. Hansen, Ph.D., learned at a young age that if he believed, he could achieve.

Now retired from Michigan State University (MSU), it's a model he lived by throughout his educational endeavors and professional career.

Hansen graduated from Ionia High School in 1967 and enrolled at Grand Rapids Junior College where he studied architecture and drafting. It didn't take long for him to realize that he was already bored with his chosen path. Thus, he decided to change majors and colleges.

"I had heard good things about MCC," he said. "I tried out for the basketball team and made it. It kind of helped my self-confidence. My mom told me I could do things just as well as anyone else, but I had to try. That's a personal motto I've had all my life."

While a student at MCC, Hansen also served in student government and sang in the choir and barbershop quartet. At first, he said these activities were outside of his comfort zone, but he grew into the roles.

Through his participation in student government, Hansen was invited by then-MCC President Dr. Donald Fink to take part in the college's first accreditation hearing at the Palmer Hilton Hotel in Chicago, Ill.

"I was told that as both a student and student body president, my testimony would be valuable, so I gladly accepted the invitation to participate," he said. "It was such an exceptional experience for a small town boy from

Ionia, that even after 50 years, many images of the trip and the meetings are still visible in my mind.

"Those leadership and educational experiences were critical, not only for the rest of my undergraduate and graduate studies, but also with leadership positions in the Army during the Vietnam Era and during my career with Michigan State University," he added. "I learned as much from my failures in these positions as I did from my successes."

Hansen earned an Associate of Arts degree from MCC in 1969. He continued his education at Central Michigan University and MSU, earning bachelor's, master's and post-doctoral degrees. He spent his career working in a variety of positions with MSU Extension, most recently as the coordinator of the MSU Extension Homeland Security and Wildfire Program.

Hansen said he believes part of his success at MCC was due to the support he received from the faculty and staff.

"As a smaller school, there was support from all directions, which was extremely important to me," he said. "The class sizes were smaller and faculty had more time to spend with students. They got to know us and were involved in our education. I could go talk directly with my instructors when I needed to.

"My experiences at MCC showed me that you just have to believe in yourself and try things," he said. "I went from being the student body president in college to chairing state and national committees during my career. Those successes go back to the foundation I received at MCC." ■