

Larry Petersen led MCC's first basketball team

By Shelly Springborn

Larry Petersen has fond memories as Montcalm Community College's first basketball coach.

He was appointed to the position during the MCC Board of Trustees meeting on Oct. 10, 1967.

"We didn't have a gym," Petersen said. "We played anywhere we could.

"One night, we went clear to Blanchard just to practice," he recalled. "Stanton and Sheridan had gymnasiums where we practiced, too."

Home games were played at Central Montcalm and Greenville.

The team made its debut on Nov. 12, 1967, against Grand Rapids Baptist Bible College at Central Christian High School in Grand Rapids. It was the first of a 15-game schedule of which eight were played at the Central Montcalm High School gymnasium.

In an article from *The Daily News* dated Nov. 11, 1967, Petersen said he was optimistic about the team's ability, even though it was lacking in height.

"We will have to depend on speed both offensively and defensively," he said in the article.

Their work paid off with the Centurions downing Grand Rapids Baptist College 76-58.

It was the start of a three-year coaching run for Petersen.

The longtime Stanton-area resident, now age 85, said he doesn't remember all the details anymore, but he got a glimmer in his eyes when he talked about those years and how his experiences shaped his lengthy career in education.

Petersen was working as the local director of migrant education and one of the events for the summer program was to visit MCC.

"There was a lot of construction going on out there," Petersen recalled.

During that visit, he met Dean of Students Robert Tupper.

Shortly thereafter, Petersen had just taken a job as the

principal at Central Montcalm Middle School when Tupper contacted him.

"Bob told me the student body at MCC was working to get college sports going, specifically basketball," he said.

It was a role near and dear to Petersen's heart.

"I went and talked with Superintendent Jake Helms about the opportunity," Petersen said.

As they say, "the rest is history."

Petersen left Central Montcalm to coach basketball at MCC. After three years as the college's basketball coach, he had the opportunity to lead the college's physical education program, so he transitioned into that position.

"We had basic activity-type courses," he said. "We played table tennis, had a bowling class at the bowling alley in Sheridan and an archery class at Packard's indoor archery place at Turk Lake.

"Then we made some contacts with Central Michigan University and I taught Foundations of Physical Education, which transferred to CMU," he said.

Looking back, Petersen said the addition of baseball for a year at MCC was "a real highlight" in his career when the team defeated Central Michigan's JV team under Petersen's coaching.

In the early 1970s with the Vietnam draft, enrollments declined and "of course, physical education was the first to be cut," Petersen said.

That took him back to where his educational career began – Central Montcalm Public Schools – where he served as varsity baseball coach from 1974 through 1994, and taught history, social studies, senior government and Michigan history.

He also coached junior varsity basketball during his career at Central Montcalm.

"All my years in education were good to me," he said. ■

