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MCC alumna achieves her goal

Betty Marier graduated with honors from MCC earlier this year

By Shanika P. Carter

Betty Marier always regretted not going to college after high school.

“I married at 19, started our family at 23, was a stay-at-home mom to our four daughters for 20 years, and went back to work part-time when our youngest daughter graduated from high school,” Marier said. “Soon the grandchildren began being born, so I took some time to be a grandma. Then it occurred to me I could go to college.”

Marier prefers to use the term “goal” instead of dream, and achieving her goal was exactly what she set out to do when she enrolled at Montcalm Community College. She took an average of two classes at a time while working full-time and running her own small business, assisting other small businesses with various accounting tasks, primarily payroll tax reporting.

“Attending MCC was one of the best experiences of my life,” Marier said. “It was the perfect setting for me at this point of my life and career. I found my studies very applicable to my life and work experiences.”

She said she thoroughly enjoyed meeting students in all different stages of their education, from the dual-enrolled high school student to the self-proclaimed seasoned student like her. She described class discussions as “spirited” when combining the perspectives from different generations.

In addition, there were times she put school on hold to take a “grandma break” as more grandchildren were born into the family. In the end, and as hard as it was at times, Marier pushed ahead and completed her degree. She said without the support of her family and friends, she could have never finished.

The journey to graduation itself was one that Marier described as being difficult at times and a long road, due to a variety of reasons, including the adjustment to the online platform due to coronavirus.

Graduating from MCC with high honors in spring 2020 with an Associate of Applied Science degree in Accounting, Marier participated in the college’s drive-thru commencement ceremony on July 11.


“It was early on in the pandemic. No one knew what was going to happen from one minute to the next. Things were changing daily, but MCC recognized the importance of validating the efforts of the students,” Marier said.

Although she missed the usual pomp and circumstance that comes with the traditional graduation ceremony, the celebration was appreciated.

“Holding graduation outside was a great idea,” she said.

Marier also expressed appreciation for the faculty, including Business Instructor Bill Bishop; Social Science Instructor Ken DeLong; Dual Enrollment English Instructor Ben Stancil; Economics Instructor Elizabeth Klooster; Mathematics Instructor Katey Johnson; and Student Success Counselor Tore Skogseth, for their contributions, time and effort in her journey and learning experience.

Marier said her college education is something she will never regret.

Now, nearing the end of her career, she said her college journey went from a lifelong goal to the first thing checked off her bucket list. 



From an early age, Sarah Spohn was a very driven student. During high school she decided to get an early start on college by enrolling in dual enrollment classes at Montcalm Community College.

“I loved the idea of getting credit for both high school and college in one class,” she said.

After graduating from Lakeview High School in 1997, Spohn decided to work full-time and attend night classes. However, life had other plans as it took her down the different path of getting married and starting a family. Although Spohn loved attending classes, as a new parent, she decided to make her children her priority and became a full-time mom.

“Like many parents, there are things you give up or go without so your children can have what you find important,” she said. “This put college on the back burner for many years but there was always a longing inside me that never went away, nagging at me to go back to school.”

After 20 years of tending to her family, Spohn made the decision to go back to school and finish her degree. With the credits she had already earned, it was possible for her to begin where she left off and get back on track to finish college.

“MCC was able to apply the credits I had earned years ago, and the counselors were able to help me plan a schedule that worked for me,” she said.

With five school-aged children, some of which were dual-enrolled at MCC, and her own packed schedule as a full-time student, Spohn’s life became even more demanding. However, Spohn said MCC’s online resources helped her find balance in her busy schedule.

“The technology now is amazing – you can create and change your own schedule online; drop and add classes; view time, teacher and day options; and even see what books are needed for each class,” Spohn said. “This, along with online class options, made it much easier to work around the rest of my life.”

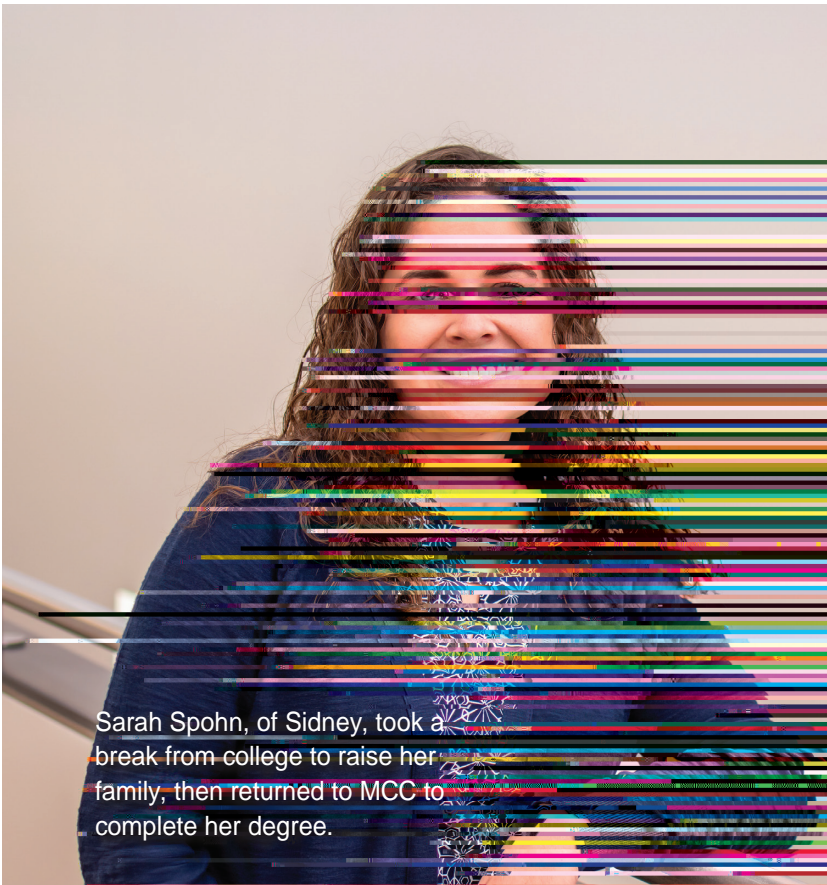
Along with the help she received from MCC to work around her personal schedule, her husband was a big supporter in making her studies a priority.

“Fortunately, I have a very supportive husband who often made up the slack while I poured myself into my studies – I am so grateful for the love and support of my family,” she said.

Although Spohn initially was working toward a business management degree at MCC, she decided to switch her track to accounting. This did not make the challenge any easier as classes got tougher and her life became more occupied. However, with her strong study ethic and motivation, Spohn was able to finish all her classes with A’s.

In 2018, Spohn earned a Liberal Studies Certificate with high honors, an Associate of Science & Arts with high honors and she completed all her basic educational requirements under the Michigan Transfer Agreement. In 2019, she earned an Associate of Applied Science in

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Sarah Spohn, of Sidney, took a break from college to raise her family, then returned to MCC to complete her degree.

Accounting with high honors.

“It wasn’t very easy, and I did sacrifice a lot, but I did achieve that goal. I had waited so long to go back to school that I wanted to be the best student I could,” she said.

Due to her hard work and outstanding achievements while at MCC, Spohn was selected for a summer internship at Sidney State Bank, working in the Bookkeeping and Operations Department. This internship developed into a full-time job and she began working as the Financial Analyst and Human Resource Generalist at the bank.

After graduating from MCC and continuing her work at Sidney State Bank, Spohn decided to go back to school once again and get her bachelor’s degree in business management from Western Governors University.

Spohn recently joined the Peterson McGregor & Associates Insurance Company team as an account manager. With the experience she gained at Sidney State Bank and the skills she learned at MCC, the company’s new expansion to Grand Rapids became a great opportunity for Spohn to embark on this new journey.

“This is a great opportunity for me to utilize all the knowledge and skills I acquired at MCC and Sidney State Bank,” she said. “I look forward to bringing clients a great experience in employee benefits.”

Spohn said her foundation from MCC allowed her to discover more about herself and sparked a fire for her education and future.

For current students or anyone thinking about returning to school, Spohn has some words of encouragement.

“Although it may be a challenge and you might have to give up some things you enjoy, it will all be worth it in the end,” she said. “Yes, there are times you have to do homework before bed instead of watching a television show but sacrifice always precedes success.”

“It is easy to stay in your comfort zone and just accept what is, but that longing to do more, to be more, will always be there until you do something about it, and MCC is a great place to start.”

-- Sarah Spohn

When she is not working, Spohn enjoys spending time with her family, playing cards with her grandmother and being very active outdoors. She also enjoys helping as the treasurer at her church, where she can apply her accounting skills.

Spohn’s story is proof that no matter what stage of life you are in, there is always room for growth and room to make a better and wiser version of yourself.

“A person can do anything they put their mind to – take the kids to school, complete your coursework, make dinner, and still make it to the band concert. Maybe I am not the only one who will be better because of my education,” she said. **Q**