

The Hardesty Memorial Endowment Fund

James Hardesty, a vital contributor to the Northern Indiana Community Foundation, has dedicated much of his life to giving back, especially to Starke County, which he has called home since he was born on his Hamlet farm on January 29, 1922 to Raymond and Anna Hardesty.

Jim still lives on the farm that his grandfather bought in 1895, and he believes he and his brother were probably both born there in the house where he still lives. In a time when things were rough, Jim and his brother were raised to know the value of work, feeding chickens and taking care of farm chores. "We were farm kids," Jim recalls. "Just little farm kids dressed in overalls."

When Jim wasn't working on the farm with his father, he attended the Hamlet school. He remembers coming home each day to sandwiches of some kind. His mother was a stay-at-home mom, and she also helped on the farm. She would read the funnies to Jim after school until he eventually was able to read them himself, which as a child was very exciting.

When Jim graduated from Hamlet High School, he went on to study Agricultural Economics at Purdue University. His career at Purdue was interrupted, though, when during his junior year, the attack on Pearl Harbor devastated the country. University staff advised Jim and the other men that they would have to go to the Army, so it was suggested that they volunteer. Jim was able to attend summer school and receive his degree in December rather than the following June. He then joined the Army and went overseas, where he had many unforgettable experiences.

"It was an experience I wouldn't have wanted to have missed for anything," Jim says. He explains that nothing bad happened to him, and he was provided the opportunity to see much of the world. He has returned to Europe several times since returning from the Army, the last time being just six or seven years ago.

Upon returning to the United States in 1945, Jim wasn't sure what he would do next. He returned to his family farm and went to work for his dad. "He was the boss. I worked," Jim recalls. The longer he lived there, however, the more he took over. Eventually, rather than



working for his dad and living with his parents, he ran the farm and his parents lived with him. "It's just the way it worked out," he says.

The farm, on which Jim has spent his life, as well as his community, are very important and dear to him. Besides farming, Jim was always active in his community. "I thought you had to do something," he says. The neighbor kids asked him to be their 4-H leader, and as a former 4-H kid himself, he accepted and served as a leader of the Blue Ribbon Club.

He also served for a long time on the Starke County Co-Op Board and then the State Co-Op Board. He was on the Davis Township Advisory Board for twenty years. His grandfather was among the first directors of the Hamlet State Bank in 1904, which at the time was under a different title and which has since been bought by First Source Bank. Jim also served on the board of this bank for some time.

Jim had many other interests, too, including traveling and writing. He's written his family history and his Army story. He also wrote a history of Hamlet and *The History of the Starke County Courthouse*, which was published in 1997. He was interviewed for the Library of Congress' Oral History Project, and he's done several local interviews, such as one about his Army story for WKVI.com and *Generations the Magazine*.

Yet, he remains humble. He is thankful that he's gotten the opportunity to see much of the world, yet he does not want people to think he was something that he was not. "Anything that has happened to me has just happened," he says. "I had no plans for my life. My life just happened... It worked out."

One story of which he is very fond is the one he wrote about his journey to the Kentucky Derby. He remembers saying, "Jeez... I've been in London, I've been in Paris, I've been in Rome. I've been in Kuala Lumpur and Ogunquit. But I ain't never been to the Derby." Finally, he got his chance, and it was an experience he'll never forget.

Perhaps one of Jim's deepest passions, however, is benefitting his beloved community in every way he can. He has actively participated in raising funds for the Starke County Community Foundation, and he served on the board from its inception until 2008. In addition to these contributions, he has also established two permanent endowment funds which will endlessly benefit causes in Starke County that are dear to him.

He has particularly been a strong supporter and advocate for Ancilla College. He first became involved with Ancilla when he was invited to a dinner there and was asked by Orville Nichols if he wanted to become a trustee. He served two terms and later served for additional years. He is now a trustee emeritus for the school. "Ancilla College is certainly one of the most important things we've got going on around this community," Jim says. "I just want them to prosper."

Jim's life of giving has made a significant impact on the community. The dedication he has shown to the Community Foundation is not unappreciated. He hopes that by establishing the endowment funds which will benefit Starke County forever, others will be encouraged to establish funds of their own.



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"If you can't do a lot," he says, "do what you can do. Don't forget that."