

87-year-old C'ville 'senior' earns diploma

BY MARIE CHRISTNEY
STAFF WRITER

There she was, prim and proper, dressed in her white "cousin" beads and trim black suit. "Who is that woman?" Clarenceville High seniors whispered among themselves recently during their rehearsal for June 10 graduation ceremonies.

Sitting among the graduates, Lila Armbruster, 87, stood out like the first daffodil in a spring garden. After all, surrounding her in the school gym were mostly 18-year-olds, all getting ready for the big moment of their high school years, that Friday's graduation from Clarenceville High.

On June 10, along with Clarenceville's 80 high school students, Armbruster received her high school diploma through the district's Continuing Education Program. Just like the seniors, she walked to the podium and received the treasured document.

Armbruster started her journey toward a high school degree about 10 years ago, after her husband, Ray, died.

"I was living alone for the first time in my life," she said. "I had nothing to do and I was lonely. Rather than vegetate, I decided to take courses."



Young and old: Lila Armbruster, 87, chats with Clarenceville High senior Kristina Radloff during graduation rehearsal Wednesday. To her right is Kristen Przeglazka. All three were among Clarenceville High's 86 graduates Friday, 80 from the high school and six from the continuing education.

It was a surprising decision because, as a published author, newspaper columnist and reporter, Armbruster had a lot of laurels to rest upon.

Back in the 1950s, she worked as a columnist for the now-defunct Garden City News. Her column covered all the social happenings of the community, from gossip to weddings to births.

In the 1970s, she and her husband retired to Mio, where she reported news for the local newspaper.

One of the biggest stories she covered involved hearings held in Mio over the PBB environmental disaster. Officials wanted to bury PBB-contaminated cows near Mio; local residents objected.

"I lived not far from the burial site," she said.

Through the years, she also kept a journal about her family, her life and living in Michigan. Eventually, she self-published her writings into a book, "Shipoke." Shipoke was a pet name her family had for her when she was young. The book is in Livonia's libraries.

Born in 1906 in Atlanta, Mich., she moved as a teen with her family to Flint.

"There were eight kids in our family; my folks needed help," she said in explaining why she never finished high school.

Eventually, her family moved to Detroit. She married Ray in the 1930s and had three children.

Her two sons and daughter attended the big graduation party held for her Saturday, June 11, at Livonia's McNamara Towers, where she lives.

"We thought about having it Friday, but a lot of my friends don't stay up that late," she said.



Proud moment: At 87, Lila Armbruster of Livonia was the oldest graduate in Clarenceville's Class of '94. She earned her diploma from the district's continuing education program.

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