



## **Livingston County Loses Beloved Community Leader, Veteran, and Philanthropist, Jim Mortensen**

*Long-Time Genoa Township Trustee and Brighton Area Fire Authority Board member, Jim "Hubert J." Mortensen, Passes Away at 89*

Brighton, Michigan – [November 28, 2023] – Jim "Hubert J." Mortensen, a revered figure admired for his dedicated service as a long-time Genoa Township Trustee and his extensive involvement with the Brighton Area Fire Authority, passed away on November 27, 2023, at the age of 89. His legacy is marked by decades of unwavering commitment to community welfare and public service.

Hubert J. Mortensen, known as Jim, was born to the late Marie and Severt Mortensen on April 20, 1934. He was proudly born and raised in Iron Mountain, Michigan, home of the highest man-made ski jump in the United States at the time. He and his lifelong friend, Bill Archer, regularly bragged that Michigan State University basketball coach Tom Izzo and former Detroit Lions coach Stephen Mariucci were from their hometown.

At a young age, Jim taught himself ventriloquism and began entering and winning talent competitions. He regularly corresponded with the famous ventriloquist Edgar Bergen, who eventually purchased two of Jim's first dummies. These dummies and his favorite dummy, Barney O'Shay, are now on display at the Vent Haven Museum in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky. He kept up his interest in ventriloquism throughout the years by entertaining his family on special occasions and traveling with his two grandsons to attend the Vent Haven International Ventriloquist Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Before the Mackinac Bridge was constructed, Jim took the ferry from northern Michigan to attend Michigan State University, where he met Mariel Walker, the love of his life. During his college years, Jim continued his entertainment pursuits, performing with Barney and touring as an opening act for the MSU Glee Club. In the summers, he showcased his talents at the Gateway Hotel in Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, mingling with notable figures like Bob Hope and Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Additionally, he offered private ventriloquist lessons and classes, which enabled him to save enough to purchase an engagement ring. He and Mariel married in Greenville, Michigan, on November 8, 1958.

After graduation, Jim served as a 2nd Lieutenant for eight years, with combined active duty in the U.S. Army and reserve duty in the Air National Guard. Jim and Mariel relocated to Plymouth, Michigan, where he embarked on his extensive career at Ford Motor Company, assuming the management of the company's warranty department at a young age. While at Ford, he pursued his MBA at night from the University of Detroit Mercy.

As a key member of the executive finance team at Ford, he played a pivotal role in the acquisition and sale of Pilkington Glass in Toronto, Canada. This experience led to his tenure as Vice President of Finance for six years in Toronto, where he worked in the downtown area while residing with his family in Orangeville, Ontario. His time at Ford and Canada marked professional achievements and fostered enduring friendships that lasted a lifetime.

After concluding a 32-year tenure at Ford Motor Company, leveraging his extensive finance background, he dedicated himself to serving the local community. Jim's commitment led him to volunteer with the Livingston County United Way and venture into politics. He secured five consecutive four-year terms as the Genoa Township Trustee and contributed his expertise to the Genoa Township Planning Commission for 23 years.

His unwavering dedication to Livingston County's nonprofits earned him the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from the United Way in 2005. Even amidst a two-month hospitalization during his campaign at age 88, Jim stood as a primary candidate for Livingston County Commissioner. Despite his determination, prolonged illness led him to resign from the Genoa Board of Trustees in September 2023. He believed his inability to attend meetings was a disservice to the citizens he aimed to represent.

One of the honors of his life was serving for 22 years on the Brighton Area Fire Authority Board. He believed that firefighters embody courage, sacrifice, and selflessness as they put themselves on the front lines, facing danger to protect lives and property. In recognition of his service and commitment, a proclamation in his honor was made by the BAFA in May 2022.

After the death of his wife of 62 years, Mariel, he was fortunate to meet Lou Ann Edwards, who provided much love, laughter, and support in his final few years.

While he had an insatiable appetite for reading and seeking knowledge, his legacy will be etched by his remarkable sense of humor, captivating storytelling, gentle nature, and unwavering love and support for everyone in his life. His driving force was a dedication to making the world a better place, embodying the spirit of the 'man in the arena.' His commitment to enhancing the lives of others was undeniable, yet above all, his greatest source of pride rested in his grandchildren and cherished family.

Jim is preceded in death by his wife of 62 years, Mariel Walker, and is survived by his beloved brother, Derrick (Carole). He leaves behind his children Jim (Laurie) Mortensen, MariAnn (Dale) Apley, and Linda Mortensen, as well as his beloved grandchildren, Kate Mortensen (Jordan Northrop), Andrea Mortensen (Dan Bartnam), Jamie Mortensen (Alex Wolfe), and Braeleigh, Caroline, and Trip Apley. Lastly, he is survived by all his wonderful nieces and nephews.

A visitation will be held on Friday, December 1st, from 11 am-12 pm at the Lynch and Sons Funeral Home, with the funeral at 12 pm. There will be a reception immediately following at Lakelands Country Club. A private burial with *Full Military Honors* will occur at Chilson Cemetery at 3:30 pm.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Livingston County United Way or the Brighton Area Fire Authority in Jim Mortensen's honor.