

John “Jack” Hackman

Nominated by Thom Gerretsen

Jack Hackman made Marshfield and Wisconsin better places in countless ways. But his greatest achievement was to inspire so many others to reach their own greatest heights.



Whether it was his hundreds of WDLB Radio broadcasts of local high school sporting events, his three terms as a Marshfield Common Council member, or his long leadership in community projects and the radio industry both here-and-beyond, Jack (1933-2018) brought both a kind heart and a bulldog determination to whatever and whomever he touched. He was too busy overcoming polio to focus on failure. He often said he had never worked a day in his life; a true life of service.

Jack’s high school broadcasts illuminated the athletic skills of young people who would later use the lessons of sports to be better people wherever life takes them. His passion for local sports has lived on many years later, as Marshfield’s main baseball field carried his name (Jack Hackman Field) as of early 2022.

Jack’s involvement with city government showed his bulldog mentality. Most notably, he refused to take “no” for an answer when -- as president of the city Library Board -- he made multiple efforts to obtain city funding for an expanded library, which eventually came to fruition in the 1980s when it was at 211 E. Second St.

This was part of Jack’s larger mission to help area residents to know more about their community. Local programming was a hallmark of WDLB when he first became its station manager in 1965. In the following three decades, Jack oversaw 15 radio stations in Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan as a vice-president and chief operating officer for WDLB’s parent company, Goetz Broadcasting. The stations were located in smaller cities, mostly of 20,000 residents or fewer. As they worked together, Jack’s efforts resulted in the creation of statewide news & farm networks during the 1980s-and-90s. They were run mostly by people he had spent years mentoring before Goetz Broadcasting was sold in 1999 following owner Nathan Goetz’s retirement.

Jack Hackman fostered a family atmosphere at WDLB. When an employee left, Jack put on a staff luncheon to wish the person well, while giving the rest of us a chance to relax and socialize. He gave great advice with sayings such as “pencils indeed have erasers” – his way of helping people learn from their mistakes instead of sweating them.

Early on, Jack spread and sought radio knowledge statewide in leadership roles with the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association. He encouraged employees to do the same in roles that included the state Broadcast News Council and Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council. As the WBA’s president in 1989-90, he helped establish the Association’s Foundation and Hall of Fame.

By the end of 2021, nine Goetz broadcasters – including Jack and I -- were enshrined in the Hall of Fame and the WBA’s Local Broadcast Legends. We were shining examples of how broadcasting excellence could be achieved by stations in smaller markets such as Marshfield, with fewer resources than our larger-city counterparts. This work was validated with numerous state-and-national awards for journalism and other community service.

In the meantime, Jack never took an eye off Marshfield. He maintained leadership roles with the Columbus High School board, the city's UW campus, Chamber of Commerce, United Way, Knights of Columbus and Marshfield Athletic Club. He also led fundraising drives for Marshfield Clinic's Lawton medical research center and the Marshfield Area YMCA. In keeping with his goal of helping others reach their potential, Jack invited several WDLB employees to take part in Leadership Marshfield.

Born and raised in nearby Pittsville, Jack Hackman was so proud of this city. Speaking of Marshfield to outsiders, he described a small city in which the Clinic's presence and international notoriety added a sophistication one does not expect in a place of 20,000. That's what he told me during my job interview – when I drove here from Portage on a Sunday afternoon in 1978 for a 3-hour conversation, most of which turned out to be a “sales pitch” for Marshfield. He gave a great first impression of this city as being a cut above. Clearly, it was his goal to raise his radio stations' quality to the same level.

I feel extremely blessed that Jack Hackman helped me find ways to serve our larger Wisconsin journalism profession without ever having to leave Marshfield. I am proud to nominate the first person I met here, Jack Hackman, as one of Marshfield's 150 honored residents for its first 150 years.