

Never too late: 99-year-old veteran achieves lifelong dream

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CORRESPONDENT

Louis "Lou" Pioli just proved it's never too late to achieve your dreams. At 99-years-old, the South Burlington World War II Veteran was awarded his college degree from Niagara University at a ceremony hosted by Saint Michael's College on May 20 with over 40 friends and family members in attendance.

Loved ones came from as far as Michigan to witness Pioli in a full cap and gown as he received his diploma from Niagara's Provost Dr. Timothy Ireland, who traveled from Niagara University, N.Y., to meet Pioli and deliver a special commencement speech at the event.

"[Usually] the commencement speaker stands up and spends half an hour to 40 minutes talking about what these young students need to do with their lives," Ireland said. "So, Lou, I've got a couple tips. My friend, I have no words of wisdom. It is you who are guiding us today."

Pioli began as a freshman at Niagara University in 1940 and was drafted during WWII one year later. He served honorably as a glider trooper in the 13th



PHOTO BY CAT CUTILLO

Lou Pioli of South Burlington, seated, at his college commencement last month with Dr. Timothy Ireland, Niagara University Provost. Pioli is 99 years old and a veteran of World War II. It was due to his being drafted in 1941 that he could not finish his degree at Niagra University.

Airborne Division stationed in France. Pioli married his wife less than one month before his initial deployment and returned home to her after the war to embrace his role as a husband and father, but he never returned to college for

his degree.

Pioli says the chairman of the draft had him scheduled to deploy just two weeks before his sophomore year classes were to commence. Pioli says

See **PIOLI** on page 17

Progress on 180 Market stormwater continues

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STAFF WRITER

At a regular city council meeting on Monday night, councilors discussed tentative progress made with the South Burlington School District on a stormwater management resolution for 180 Market Street.

"I certainly get the sense from Elizabeth [Fitzgerald, school board chair] that they're ready to work with us on the project," council chair Helen Riehle told her colleagues.

Councilors Riehle, Dave Kaufman and Meaghan Emery

attended a special meeting with school board members on May 28 during which school officials voted to tentatively approve the conceptual design that city and school-employed engineers outlined on May 22.

The conceptual design calls for stormwater management wholly within impervious areas of the Rick Marcotte Central School property without the use of additional school property outside the impact area of city hall construction and school parking lot reconfiguration.

See **STORMWATER** on page 10

Wheeler Homestead dog park approved by council

LEE KAHRIS
THE OTHER PAPER

The city council unanimously approved the establishment of a new dog park at Wheeler Homestead at a regular meeting Monday night.

The council voted 5-0 to approve the new park following an in-depth presentation by South Burlington Dog Park Committee Chair Barb Sirvis. The committee has worked on the issue since last fall, trying to find the right site for the new park. Public input was gathered through an online survey and two public information meetings over

the course of the early spring and summer, which culminated in the proposal for the dog park at Wheeler Homestead.

Wheeler Homestead and Nature Park are owned by the city and located along Dorset Street just south of Cairns Arena. The dog park would take up at least 1.5 acres. Water lines would be installed to provide drinking water for dogs, as well as split rail fencing with wire fencing inside of it and boulders to denote the park using the natural contours of the area.

The estimated cost of building

See **DOG PARK** on page 11



PHOTO BY CAT CUTILLO

Lou Pioli, seated, with his family at his commencement, from left, granddaughter-in-law Carah Pioli-Hunt, grandson Kevin Pioli-Hunt and daughter Lou Ann Pioli, with whom he resides in South Burlington.

PIOLI

continued from page 1

he had asked the chairman for an extension to finish college but he was denied.

"That's what turned my life – the chairman of the board not giving me the ample time to go back to school," Pioli said during a March interview recording his life stories. "It could have been different. You never know. But I guess it just wasn't destined to happen."

After hearing the regret her father still harbored after 75 years, his daughter Lou Ann Pioli says she had an idea when the annual report from Niagara University serendipitously arrived just three days later at her South Burlington home where her father lives with her. Lou Ann says she was reading the president's opening letter when it struck her.

"He wrote about what embodies purple pride," says Lou Ann, noting the school's colors. "I said, 'Well my dad is all of those things. I'm going to write him a letter and tell him about my dad and see if there's any way they might award him an honorary degree before he dies because he's 99 and it was the one regret he mentioned.'"

She says she never expected what happened next. The school wrote back that they would grant 20 credits of life experience and confer upon Pioli the degree of Associates of Arts. What's more, they wanted to come to Vermont to present Pioli's diploma to him

in person.

"It was such a unique request," Ireland said. "To be able to make this request come to fruition, it's who we are at Niagara. It felt like it was meant to be."

In addition, the university wanted to fly a family member to Niagara, to represent Pioli at the actual University commencement ceremony on May 18.

"I started to cry and got goose bumps," said Lou Ann, adding that her father was also flabbergasted. "The tears just rolled down his face. He just couldn't believe it."

Grandson Kevin Pioli-Hunt, who is a teacher in Williston and says his grandfather was always a father figure, traveled to Niagara to receive the degree onstage at the commencement and says the university rolled out the red carpet for his grandfather in every way.

"To be honored with this on his behalf was amazing," Pioli-Hunt said. "It meant the world."

Lou Ann and her father watched the ceremony from their home in South Burlington. Although Pioli is now legally blind and hard of hearing, Lou Ann says she described what was happening as they showed a collage of photographs onstage of her dad and read his story which erupted in a standing ovation.

"I was crying and saying, 'Dad, there's a standing ovation. They're all standing,'" Lou Ann said. "He just got this huge smile

and got very teary and said 'How 'bout that?'"

"It speaks volumes to the respect for Nono's generation and what type of man he is and what type of legacy he has as well," Pioli-Hunt said, using his grandfather's nickname.

At the ceremony in Vermont, Pioli was also presented with a Veterans coin awarded from Niagara University.

"I think that it just goes to show you that your goals are always attainable," said Carah Pioli-Hunt, who is married to Kevin. "At 99-years-old, you can graduate from a university with honors. It sets the bar high but it shows you that you can get to that bar and exceed it."

Pioli's original anticipated graduation date was May of 1944. Now a full 75 years later, he finally has his diploma. And despite the fact that he can no longer see it, his daughter says she is inspired everyday by his "take it in stride" attitude.

"With all the losses he's suffered both personal and people in his family, and now his vision, his hearing, his mobility. He's confined to a wheelchair. He doesn't complain," Lou Ann said. "Ever. He has taken that 'take it in stride' advice and lives it everyday."

He's just amazing. I couldn't be happier that he was able to realize one of the things that he had always wished for."