

93-year-old to graduate from MSU Dec. 18

Bingo is a waste of time

Mankato, MN ? Elizabeth Becker, a 93-year-old Fairmont, Minn., resident, may be the oldest person ever to graduate from Minnesota State University, Mankato when she receives her associate degree in liberal studies on Saturday, Dec. 18.

The university has no ?oldest graduate? records. But long-time faculty and staff members can?t recall anyone older than Becker who?s received a degree.

?If you ask me, bingo is a waste of time,? she told The Free Press of Mankato earlier this year. ?I think everybody should try and learn something new every day.?

A devoted water color artist and an active church member, Becker admits some classes were harder than others. But, she adds, ?I enjoyed myself while doing it.?

Her husband?s death 20 years ago prompted Becker to think about her own mortality. She grew up in a large family in Peoria, Ill., and left high school during her sophomore year to help support her siblings. Later she moved to rural Fairmont with her husband, Marvin Becker. They bought a farm and raised their son, Robert.

Marvin died in 1982, and at age 80 Elizabeth decided to take the General Educational Development High School Equivalency Diploma test. She earned her diploma, and in 1994 took her first class through MSU?s extended campus at Fairmont, ?to see what I could do.? For the last 10 years she?s taken one to two classes per semester.

She?s studied history, art, English, science, psychology, math, politics, government, women?s studies and wildlife. She was driven to keep up with the younger students, and she seldom missed a class.

General education courses are offered in Fairmont every semester by MSU, and students in the Fairmont Extended Learning program may earn an Associates of Arts degree. The Fairmont Extended Learning Program started in 1957.

Unlike the 100-year-old student who earned a master?s degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary last week, she doesn?t think she?ll pursue a higher degree. ?At my age, if I were to get the complete certificate (a bachelor?s degree), it would have to come by way of heaven,? she chuckles.

But if other interesting classes are offered in Fairmont, she says she?ll take them ? just for the fun of it.