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RIT teaching legend Fram retires

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His friends call him Gene, a colleague calls him "the Cal Ripken of the academic world," and reporters call him on the phone for his marketing expertise nearly every day.

And after 51 years at Rochester Institute of Technology, Eugene Fram is retiring at the age of 78.

"I don't have any regrets," said Fram. "I think it's the fact that I was having fun. I've looked around, I've had some offers from other schools, but when I put it all together, the fit was not there. The fit here was fine with me."

The J. Warren McClure Research Professor of Marketing at RIT's E. Philip Saunders School of Business, Fram started a brief career with the Associated Merchandising Corp. in New York City before accepting a position at RIT in 1957. After he got his doctorate from State University of New York at Buffalo, he began a long and storied career in academic research.

"Before I left the AMC, they had a division there that was installing a new thing called a 'computer,' " said Fram. "So I decided that I would do a study on the impact of the computer on marketing at that point, and I was off and running on a research track."

Fram has written or co-written more than 100 articles and six books, the most famous being *Policy Vs. Paper Clips: Selling the Corporate Model to Your Nonprofit Board*. He won RIT's Eisenhart Award for Outstanding Teaching — RIT's highest teaching award — in 1997.

"I think one of the really interesting things about him is when I go out to meet alumni, a number of them remember Gene," said Ashok Rao, dean of the business school. "More than one of them has told me how, as a result of him, they embarked on new careers which were totally different than what they had planned on when they came here."

One of those alumni is Mike McCarthy, now an assistant professor of marketing at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. McCarthy, who refers to Fram as "the Cal Ripken of the academic world" thanks to his longevity and work ethic, took undergraduate and graduate classes with Fram through the '70s and '80s.

"He had a very pragmatic approach to the topic," said McCarthy. "Unlike people who had mountains of textbooks and lecture materials, Gene was far more focused on the use of the material in the real world."

Fram pushed McCarthy, who was considering continuing his work as a marketing and advertising executive, to consider a career as a professor. The two have since collaborated on a number of studies and publications.

"His encouragement really started the process of easing out of the corporate world," said McCarthy. "I've done this for 20 years now, and there's no question this was something I was well-suited to."

Fram also leaves behind a legacy of open communication with the media — what he jokingly calls "shameless self-promotion." Fram said he has been interviewed nearly 100 times a year, and he and his studies have been quoted in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and by the Associated Press.

His studies "were always very leading-edge thinking," said McCarthy. "That's one of the reasons he's sought out by the press."

Fram's publications often preceded market trends, explained McCarthy. When a new topic became the focus of the business world, reporters would call Fram because he was one of the few academics who had already published research on the subject.

"He found many, many things interesting," said McCarthy. "He was just constantly learning and constantly developing new thinking and constantly teaching that new thinking."

Though Fram said he would have been happy staying here and continuing his work, his retirement to Palo Alto, Calif., will allow him to be closer to his two sons and four grandsons.

"I've been very fortunate," said Fram.

"One of my physicians asked me, 'Do you regret that you didn't retire earlier?' and I said an emphatic 'no.' It's been a pleasure to go to work."

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