

Butler County American Legion Riders choose BC3 for student-veteran scholarship

“The skills that veterans receive in the military don’t always transfer back”

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(Butler, PA) Nearly 100 motorcyclists are gearing up for a 100-mile ride to fund a \$500 scholarship to Butler County Community College student-veterans whose lives are changing gears.

BC3 student-veterans such as Staff Sgt. Charles “James” Muehlbronner, who after serving nine years in the Air Force returned to his native Harrisville and, at 38, realized he needed to continue his education.

The Slippery Rock Area High School graduate, a former trucker, a husband and father of a 10-year-old son, began looking for a job after he was released from active duty in September 2014.

“Whenever you are in the military, they always tell you, ‘With a military background, you will get a job anywhere.’ Well,” Muehlbronner says, “that is not exactly the case.”

As a sensor operator in the Air Force, Muehlbronner worked with drones’ cameras, lasers and weapons guidance systems.

“Basically, I was going to do the same thing as a private contractor,” he says.

That would have been with a company in Hagerstown, Md., which would rotate its employees on 90-day assignments overseas.

“Then I would come home for 30 days,” Muehlbronner says.

The position, he says, was his – until his separation date from active duty was delayed.



Members of the Butler County American Legion Riders on Main Street, Butler. The group will donate a portion of money raised during a 100-mile ride July 22 to a scholarship fund that benefits Butler County Community College student-veterans. Submitted photo.

After his honorable discharge, he says he found that the career field with the civilian drone contractor was 52 percent overmanned, and “the jobs were all gone. They couldn’t hold the job for me for five months. So I kind of lost my slot.”

But then he found BC3.

And the Butler County American Legion Riders Veterans Incentive Scholarship.

Student-veterans “have to move on with their lives”

The Butler County American Legion Riders group is composed of veterans, their relatives, spouses and auxiliary members representing 10 posts who share a love of assisting former servicemen and women – and riding motorcycles.

“(We) were formed as a group of motorcycle enthusiasts who belonged to the American Legion for the good of helping and supporting veterans,” says Shawn Kelly, of Karns City, the grandson of a World War II Navy veteran and owner of a 2007 Yamaha V Star 1300.

“We try to help veterans in any way we can. And certainly we try to help veterans who are trying to better themselves. We understand that coming home after a length of service and wanting to start a new career track is difficult and we wanted to support them any way that we could.”

Kelly, of American Legion Post 243, West Sunbury, is chairman of the committee that raises funds for the Butler County American Legion Riders Veterans Incentive Scholarship to BC3 student-veterans. Eligible student-veterans must have been honorably discharged, are taking at least six credits and have a minimum grade-point average of 2.0.

“There are several perks of the scholarship,” says Stella Smith, associate director of financial aid, adviser of the Student Veterans Association at BC3 and the school’s veterans coordinator. “To begin with, the veteran does not have to be full-time. It also recognizes the veterans for their dedication and patriotism. Veterans using their education benefits are no longer paid during the break between semesters, so the scholarship comes in handy since it is paid after the semester ends.”

About 150 student-veterans are enrolled at BC3 this spring, Smith says. Nearly 55 percent of BC3’s student-veterans are age 30 or older. About 75 percent are male. Roughly 50 percent attend college full-time – as does Muehlbronner.

BC3, named by Victory Media a Military Friendly institution for four consecutive years, is the only college or university whose student-veterans benefit from the Butler County American Legion Riders’ scholarship. BC3 is also the only college or university whose student-veterans are eligible for emergency funds from endowed accounts created by American Legion Post 778 in Lyndora and American Legion Post 117 in Butler.

“We are humbled and grateful that the American Legion Posts 778 and 117 and the American Legion Riders have chosen to support BC3 student-veterans,” says Michelle Jamieson, associate director of the BC3 Education Foundation Inc. “Through the amazing generosity of the American Legion posts and Legion Riders, student-veterans have access to a veteran-specific scholarship and emergency education funds. These funds would not exist without the wonderful members of American Legion Posts 778 and 117 and the American Legion Riders; members who continue to honor the creed, ‘No Soldier Left Behind.’”

The Butler County American Legion Riders are within three years of reaching the endowment level of \$10,000, a threshold that will enable their scholarship to be offered in perpetuity.

“That was the whole idea behind it,” says Dennis Christie, a member of American Legion Post 117, president of the Butler County American Legion Riders and owner of a 2014 Harley-Davidson Limited.

“As we grew and had more money we could do more things. And this was our legacy. Even if we fold in a number of years, that scholarship will still be there to help the veterans 20, 30 years down the road.”

The scholarship, Christie says, is important because student-veterans “have to move on with their lives. We try to help them in any way we can.”

One way was to assist student-veterans attending BC3, Kelly says.

“The skills that veterans receive in the military,” Kelly says, echoing Muehlbronner, “don’t always transfer back.”

Scholarship was “quite a relief”

Staff Sgt. Charles “James” Muehlbronner is learning new skills that he hopes will lead to a position with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The first recipient of the Butler County American Legion Riders Veterans Incentive Scholarship has taken 21 credits at BC3.

“It was quite a relief because you are trying to support a family and at the same time you have all these bills, a wife, a child, and you don’t have a paycheck,” Muehlbronner says.

While his wife works and he receives a housing allowance through the Veterans Administration, there is sometimes “barely enough to get by. So this extra (money) kind of gives you that little extra relief.”

“I wish other schools were like BC3”

Up to 50 members of the Butler County American Legion Riders are meeting monthly at American Legion Post 117 to discuss the July 22 event, which Christie says will start at 10 a.m.

in front of the VA Butler Healthcare building, 325 New Castle Road, and conclude around 4 p.m. at American Legion Post 778.

Riders pay \$20 and passengers, \$5 to participate.

The previous 12 rides – along with accompanying 50-50 raffles and American auctions on the same day -- have raised up to \$5,000 annually. A yearlong sale of \$10 tickets will result in the raffle that day of a 2017 Harley-Davidson Street Glide valued at \$22,000, Kelly says.

A portion of all proceeds will fund the Butler County American Legion Riders Veterans Incentive Scholarship and give student-veterans such as Staff Sgt. Charles “James” Muehlbronner a chance to change gears at BC3, where he found the atmosphere “relaxing,” the class sizes “small” and the campus, beautiful.”

“I wish other schools were like BC3.”