

# Emergency funds for BC3 student-veterans now perpetual

Butler County American Legions' accounts to forever give to those who gave

February 20, 2017

(Butler, PA) The Navy reservist, recently married and a father, had been saving money for the next chapter of his life: pursuing a degree full-time at Butler County Community College.

Late last fall, he met with Stella Smith, associate director of financial aid, adviser of the Student Veterans Association at BC3 and the school's veterans coordinator. He realized the magnitude of his decision to enroll at BC3, the commitment that lay ahead and the impact it would have on his future.



Al Worsley, left, commander of American Legion Post 778 in Lyndora, and Joe Hasychak, the post's finance officer, are shown Feb. 9.

“That,” said Jim Dittmer, commander of American Legion Post 117, Butler, “is very important to a veteran. He is there trying to get an education, a degree, that will get him a better job in life.”

“You feel better about yourself,” said Al Worsley, commander of American Legion Post 778, Lyndora. “That comes with it. That’s an important part of it, to be able to say, ‘I have a college degree.’ That’s a big deal.”

Just as the spring semester, and his future, were dawning, the reservist’s mother died.

Money he had saved for books to be used in BC3 classes now went toward paying for his mother’s funeral.

“You can’t go to class without a book,” Dittmer said.

Fearing the reservist’s college career would end before it began, Smith informed him about the availability of two emergency funds created by American Legion posts in Butler and Lyndora intended to help BC3 student-veterans address unexpected expenses and continue their educations at what Joe Hasychak calls the “pearl of Butler Township.”

“We are funding student-veterans in need,” said Hasychak, Post 778’s finance officer. “This was an easy thing to justify, giving it to veterans who are attending the community college.”

## Posts’ generosity removes roadblocks

Because both student-veteran funds – whose recipients remain anonymous to the American Legion posts – have reached the \$10,000 endowment level, the accounts will support BC3 student-veterans forever, according to Michelle Jamieson, associate director of the BC3 Education Foundation, Inc.

“Veterans have served their country and now want to pursue higher education,” Jamieson. “For some vets, roadblocks arise which may prevent them from continuing at BC3. Roadblocks like delayed veteran payments, unexpected car repairs, high utility bills and expensive books. These issues may cause veterans stress and often leads them to consider quitting school.”

Through the generosity of American Legion Posts 778 and 117, BC3 veteran students are able to receive financial support to overcome such roadblocks and continue their education, Jamieson said.

“By building the veterans funds to the endowment level, Posts 778 and 117 have guaranteed that support will be available to all qualified future BC3 student-veterans,” Jamieson said.

Profits realized by American Legion posts on small games of chance finance the funds, according to Worsley and Dittmer. BC3 is the only college or university at which American Legion Posts 778 and 117 have created such emergency funds for student-veterans.

Post 778’s account, established in 2013, reached the endowment level with a \$5,000 donation Jan. 13, bringing its balance to \$10,039. Through Dec. 31 it had helped student-veterans finance books, rent, natural gas, car repairs, home-heating propane and to offset a late Veterans Administration monthly payment.

Post 117’s account, established in 2015, reached the endowment level with a \$5,000 donation Jan. 20, bringing its balance to \$11,561. Through Dec. 31 it had helped student-veterans purchase books.

## “One little thing we can do”

“It’s so these guys don’t drop out of school,” Dittmer said. “School is so important. It would be just a shame if they can’t because if something goes wrong with the family or at home or with their job and they have to drop out of school.

“This is one little thing we can do.”

The accounts reaching the endowment level “is just fantastic,” said Dr. Nick Neupauer, BC3’s president. “We are here for all of our students, but those students who are military veterans hold a very special place. I am proud of our work with student-veterans and our recognition as a Military Friendly school, which validates such work.”

BC3 has been named a Military Friendly institution for four consecutive years by Victory Media. In June, it created its Green Zone. The program makes BC3 an increasingly supportive environment for student-veterans and service members by educating faculty and staff on the military experience, challenges students attending BC3 face when transitioning from military service to civilian life and to college, and resources and basic resource referral techniques.

About 150 student-veterans are enrolled at BC3 this spring, Smith said. 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.

And some would leave BC3 because they couldn’t afford to attend school and pay unexpected bills, Smith said, echoing Jamieson.

“A lot of times if they withdrew for one semester, they weren’t coming back,” Smith said.

## “Taking care of our own”

Student-veterans must be in good academic standing and have a minimum grade-point average of 2.0. Grants are capped at \$1,000 per student-veteran.

The application for BC3 student-veteran funds states that the account is to provide emergency grants to honorably discharged veterans and current military members attending BC3 for needs that may affect their ability to continue to attend BC3.

Upon approval by the vice president for student affairs and enrollment management, and the BC3 veterans

coordinator, the BC3 Education Foundation, Inc. will directly pay the vendor to whom the veteran owes funds.

Student-veterans are asked to write a letter of gratitude to the American Legion posts if their request is approved.

“How hard is that?” Smith said. “To thank them for the money.”

The harder part may be in the asking for help.



Jim Dittmer, commander of American Legion Post 117 in Butler, is shown Feb. 9.

“They think it is a sign of weakness,” Smith said, “because it is drilled into them through basic training, the military life. This is what you have to do – adapt and overcome.”

But Dittmer – who served eight years in the Army, a tour in Vietnam, and in 1984 earned an associate degree in electronics technology from BC3 – references another military mind set: Leave no man behind.

“It’s an old combat thing,” he said, “but it means doing what we can for others who are in need. Taking care of our own.”

### “We will help you”

Added Hasychak, who earned an associate degree in accounting from BC3 in 1973 after serving four years in the Navy: “We will help you. This isn’t broadcast that we are going to help because he can’t make his house payment or his gas bill,” he said. “It is done very quietly. We want them to know about it and not be embarrassed by it.”

The existence of the funds has been announced at Student Veterans Association meetings and through information distributed to all student-veterans on campus, Smith said.

The Navy reservist who entered Smith’s office despondent a month ago left with hope of receiving emergency funds for books and the dream of a BC3 degree intact.

“He was just very grateful,” Smith said. “He asked, ‘I don’t have to pay this back?’

“I said, ‘No, no. This is what it is for.’

“He was very appreciative of it. I couldn’t tell you how many times he said thank you.”