

# 1968 grad: BC3 “kept the drive going”

New community college opened lifetime doors, members of first commencement class say

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Among BC3's Class of 1968 are, front row, from left, Sandra Hilderbrand, Susan West, Natalie Stariat, Jacqueline Shedio, Nancy Adams, Mary Giles and Marie Pelliccione. Second row, from left, Josephine Harlan, Marilyn Pelliccione, Kathleen Parker, Patricia Furka, Donna McWilliams, Karen Mennor, Kathrynann Bellaji and Mary Ann Long. Third row, from left, Carole M. Kennedy, C. Dallas Sarver Jr., Dorothy Lee, Diane Brown, Linda Andrew, Helen Cehelsky, Valdevia Clark, Carol Heckathorne, Cynthia Trimble and Mary Ellen Walker. Fourth row, from left, Ronald Thompson, unidentified, Robert Double, Raymond Lewis, Thomas Hall, Chalmer Ritzert, William Wuenstel and Betsy Yates.

(Butler, PA) Four years after being born in Germany to prisoner-of-war native Ukrainians who were transported into forced labor camps during World War II, Natalie Stariat would travel across the Atlantic Ocean with parents Dmytro and Ann, and twin brother, Peter, settle in Lyndora and grow to discover a new world of opportunities at Butler County Community College.

The daughter of former villagers whose formal educations advanced no further than the fourth grade, Stariat would graduate from Butler Senior High School in 1966, enroll in a community college offering its first classes three months later, and that, she says, “was the start of it all.”

BC3 was also the start of it all for Carole M. Kennedy, an obstetrician-gynecologist at Magee Womens Hospital of UPMC, Pittsburgh.

As it was for Raymond Lewis, a former adjunct faculty member at Harford Community College in Bel Air, Md.

And for 59 other black-gowned classmates, who rose from wooden folding chairs planted on a lawn between BC3's only three buildings and marched across a makeshift outdoor stage one bright Sunday afternoon to receive associate degrees or certificates as part of BC3's first graduating class – the Class of 1968.

“I had a sense of being the first and accomplishing something that had not been done before,” Lewis said. “I had a feeling of accomplishment.”

BC3 will celebrate the historic 50th anniversary of its Class of 1968 with a reception May 16 in the \$6.4 million Heaton Family Learning Commons, which opened in August 2016.

“This will give people a chance to reconnect,” said Mary Beth Rock, chair of BC3's Alumni Council, adding that invitations were sent across the United States. “They are literally from one coast to another. It would be fabulous for them to be able to come back and see people they have not seen for 50 years and see how fabulous our campus is 50 years later.”

## “Students realizing value of community college”

The Heaton Family Learning Commons was a glade in a grove of oak trees when Stariat, Kennedy, Lewis and the rest of the Class of 1968 assembled at 3 p.m. June 9 in a nearby area known as the Quadrangle on BC3's main campus in Butler Township for commencement exercises.

Fourteen buildings and 23,000 45-credits-plus students later, BC3 on May 16 will also celebrate its 578-member Class of 2018 with commencement exercises in the 24,000-square-foot Field House, built in 1975 and inside of which the Class of 1968 will also be recognized.

“It's hard to believe, to see so many students who are coming to BC3,” said Natalie Kitzko, the former Natalie Stariat who never left her alma mater upon graduating with an associate of applied science degree in secretarial science.



Natalie Stariat Kitzko, of Butler, is shown Wednesday, April 25, 2018, on the campus of Butler County Community College in Butler Township. Kitzko, a member of BC3's first class, the Class of 1968, has been employed at her alma mater since graduating with an associate of applied science degree in secretarial science.

Kitzko took her first job in a 50-year-and-counting career at BC3 in the summer of 1968 and has served as a secretary in the college's records and registration office since 1990.

"Students," she said, "are realizing the value of a community college."

Kennedy realized that value upon her 1966 graduation from Knoch High.

"Attending a four-year college seemed out of the question," said Dr. Carole M. Chesin, formerly Carole M. Kennedy, the only of Thomas and Twila Kennedy's six children to attend college.

"I had been accepted to some four-year colleges, but I was thinking, 'How am I ever going to handle this?'" she said. "My parents could help, but they certainly weren't going to be footing most of the bills. I worked while I went to BC3 and put myself through school, as I did the rest of the way."

### "BC3 taught me the ability to question and to think"

Chesin earned an associate of arts degree at BC3, a bachelor of science degree in education from Slippery Rock State College and, in 1978, a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

"It was a drive I had," Chesin said, "and BC3 kept the drive going."

BC3, she said, "provides an affordable means for many students to obtain a degree. If not for BC3, I can't imagine continuing any kind of degree. When I graduated in 1968, I viewed it as one step to continue my quest for graduate education."

Lewis would also use BC3 to continue his quest for graduate education. He received a master's degree in clinical social work from the University of Maryland at Baltimore after earning a bachelor's degree in sociology from Slippery Rock State College and an associate of arts degree at BC3 – one followed by a handshake from his father, Alfred, a brick mason at Armco Steel; and hugs from his mother, Martha, and sister, Kay.

"BC3 taught me the ability to question and to think," said Lewis, who retired from his full-time position as chief of managed care operations with the Maryland Mental Hygiene Administration



Raymond Lewis, of Bel Air, Md., is shown in an undated photo. Lewis, a member of Butler County Community College's first class, the Class of 1968, retired from his position as chief of managed care operations with the Maryland Mental Hygiene Administration in 2006 and is a former adjunct faculty member at Harford Community College in Bel Air.

in 2006. “It helped me to mature as a person and to gain skills such as critical thinking. It also gave me more of a worldview and understanding of other cultures.

“BC3 gave me and continues to give students the opportunity to learn in small class settings and to have direct contact with the actual professor rather than a teaching assistant. BC3 also prepares students for continued employment and success.”

**“If you have your associate degree, you have something to work with”**

BC3 has a student-to-faculty ratio between 18:1 and 17:1, according to Sharla Anke, assistant dean of institutional research. It also has the highest salary-to-earnings ratio among 42 regional colleges and universities, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard.

“Our students want to be able to get an education,” Kitzko said. “And they are hoping it will be at a price where they are not paying for it for the next 20 to 25 years. And that is what they can get here.”

BC3’s tuition is the lowest when compared to 41 other regional colleges and universities, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard. Seventy-five percent of recent BC3 graduates are debt-free.

As such, the future is as bright for the Class of 2018 as was the sun on the afternoon of June 9, 1968, when Natalie Stariat rose from her own wooden folding chair planted on the lawn to march across a makeshift outdoor stage to receive what is today called an associate degree in office administration-executive.

“We tell our students that – graduate from the community college,” she said. “Don’t just take two years of classes and move on. If you just take classes and leave, all you have is a bunch of classes. A bunch of credits that don’t mean anything until you finish. It’s the finishing that counts.

“Life is funny. All kinds of things happen. You think everything is going to go smoothly, but you don’t know what is right around the corner. But if you have your associate degree, you have something to work with. It’s one more plus you can put on your resume. You can get a better job than you can without it. And when you are ready to go on to the four-year school, or to finish it, then that is just icing on the cake.”

BC3 President Dr. Nick Neupauer will welcome Class of 1968 members during the reception scheduled for 5:45 p.m. in the Alumni Quiet Room of the Heaton Family Learning Commons. Neupauer will also recognize BC3’s first class during commencement exercises, which begin at 7 p.m.