

Administrator behind BC3's flourishing scholarships retires

Nov. 23, 2020



Michelle Jamieson is shown on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township on Thursday, Nov. 12, 2020, one day before she retired as associate director of the BC3 Education Foundation. Jamieson, a 1984 BC3 graduate employed by BC3 for 16 years, increased the number of named scholarships at the college by 165 percent since 2009.

(Butler, PA) Michelle Jamieson was clearing plates, and trying to clear her mind.

Eighteen months into her new position as associate director of the Butler County Community College Education Foundation, and moments after an annual BC3 banquet that introduces scholarship recipients to their benefactors, Jamieson still mulled whether she was comfortable in her role as a fundraiser.

As guests mingled near the doors of Founders Hall that October night in 2010 following BC3's Oak Hills Dinner, Mary Lou Tabisz was among the late-departing visitors.

Tabisz and her husband, Tim, of Middlesex Township, had created the Brandi L. Tabisz Memorial Scholarship, which, among its other criteria, is available annually to a single parent with full custody of a child or children.

Brandi was a BC3 education student and single mother of a 10-week-old daughter when she died unexpectedly in May 2001 from a heart condition.

Mary Lou Tabisz approached Jamieson near one of the emptying tables inside BC3's Founders Hall.

"We talked about how the scholarship kept Brandi's memory alive," Tabisz said. "And how it helped single mothers."

"And it was right there," Jamieson said, "that I knew that what I did made a difference in many different ways. That conversation was pivotal."

Jamieson – among BC3 employees who have retired this fall or will retire by Dec. 31 as part of early retirement options BC3 made available to eligible employees – has also been pivotal for her alma mater.

BC3 president: Jamieson "Pioneer Proud"

The 1984 BC3 graduate increased the number of named scholarships by 165 percent, from 52 in 2009 to 138 as of November, the annual scholarship payout by 100 percent, and the scholarship endowment fund by more than \$3.48 million.

The BC3 Education Foundation in the 2020-2021 academic year will award more than \$200,000 in named scholarships that with BC3's affordability and financial aid, allowed 80 percent of BC3's Class of 2020 to graduate debt-free.

"There are these wonderful people out there that have financial resources, who want to make a difference in the community, in the world," Jamieson said. "And we've been blessed that they have chosen BC3 to do that."

Jamieson, hired in 2004 as director of alumni programs and annual campaigns, retired Nov. 13.

During her 16-year career at BC3, Jamieson also directed the BC3 alumni program, created a BC3 distinguished alumni program that has honored 53 graduates, and coordinated the Oak Hills Dinner, each effort guided by her love of BC3, college President Dr. Nick Neupauer said.

"When I think of Michelle Jamieson, I immediately think of Pioneer Proud," Neupauer said. "She is so proud of her connection to BC3. And it is genuine. You can't fake that type of thing. It is a genuine love and connection that Michelle has had with these friends of the college. It is not a transactional type of thing. It is transformational."

“Our students directly reaped the benefits of Michelle’s dedication and passion to the college because ultimately it led to more and more friends of the college donating to BC3 and increasing the scholarship opportunities for our students.”

“BC3 is a huge part of who I am”

Those scholarship opportunities for BC3 students since Jamieson became associate director help not only single mothers, but freshmen or sophomores, students enrolled full or part time, veterans, those older than 24, those who hold at least a part-time job or those who earned a high school equivalency diploma.

Nearly one in three BC3 scholarships in 2020-2021 are connected to alumni, according to Jamieson, herself the creator of the Michelle Edinger Jamieson ’84 Scholarship.

Jamieson earned a master’s degree in organizational leadership from Geneva College and a bachelor’s degree in communications from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania after attaining an associate degree in marketing management from BC3 two years after enrolling at age 22.

“BC3 is a huge part of who I am,” Jamieson said. “It’s where I came from. When I was a student at BC3, I worked full time. I lived on my own. I fully supported myself and paid for college. Going to college and paying for college was not going to be in the cards for me if not for BC3. And without my BC3 background, I wouldn’t have a bachelor’s degree. I wouldn’t have a master’s degree. I wouldn’t have this job.”

Jamieson could “tell the story about a BC3 student because she is the story,” said Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation. “She personally embodies to those who are thinking about creating a scholarship what it was like to go to BC3.”

Jamieson was also instrumental in helping BC3 to receive two \$1 million gifts, one in 2014 from Robert R. Heaton, which helped to fund what is the Heaton Family Learning Commons; and one in 2017, from Janice Phillips Lerrick, which will help to fund BC3’s planned Victor K. Phillips Nursing and Allied Health Building on a BC3 main campus attended by Robyn Nicole LeDonne.

LeDonne, of Punxsutawney, a student in BC3’s Nursing, R.N., program, is the 2020-2021 recipient of the Brandi L. Tabisz Memorial Scholarship.

Recipients are “achieving what my daughter could not achieve during her shortened life, the dream of being educated, of having a good job versus a paycheck-to-paycheck job,” Mary Lou Tabisz said. “We are providing that opportunity for a lot of single parents to be able to do just that.”

And in doing so, keeping Brandi L. Tabisz’s memory alive.

“If I could help a parent turn something as sad as losing a child into some semblance of positivity, helping to take their sadness and their sorrow and turn it into something good,” Jamieson said, “then I felt like that was why I was there.”