

Disabled veteran, 61, BC3's most senior graduate in Class of 2020

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Kathleen Cashaw, 61, a native of Aliquippa and a resident of Butler, is the most senior graduate in Butler County Community College's Class of 2020. The disabled veteran who served in the Army and in the Mississippi National Guard earned an associate degree in BC3's 68-credit medical assistant career program.

(Butler, PA) Kathleen Cashaw, middle child of a hard-working illiterate father and of a strict mother who instilled the importance of education, did what neither her parents nor her two siblings ever did: Enroll in college. But her degree pursuits, in biology at Tuskegee University in Alabama, and as a transfer in chemistry to Howard University in Washington, D.C., began and ended within the year following her graduation from Aliquippa High School in 1976.

"I messed up in college," Cashaw said.

Thirteen months after her high school graduation, the former honor roll student at Aliquippa enlisted in the Army and in 1986, joined the Mississippi National Guard.

She also took jobs in customer service, and in making ice cream machines in one factory and automotive parts in another.

“My father didn’t think I would ever go back to college,” Cashaw said.

Thomas Cashaw Jr., a mechanic in Aliquippa, did not live long enough to see whether daughter Kathleen would go back to college. Neither did mother Ollie Mae.

But Cashaw went back. And to Butler County Community College, where the Butler resident, three months shy of her 62nd birthday, is the most senior graduate in BC3’s Class of 2020.

“For my age, I completed it,” Cashaw said. “Finally.”

BC3 instructors “kept me encouraged”

Cashaw enrolled at BC3 in spring 2016 and earned an associate degree in BC3’s 68-credit medical assistant career program. She is also 44 years and 17 days more senior than BC3’s youngest graduate in its Class of 2020, Saylee Grinnen, 17, of Wampum. Cashaw is also among the 19.5 percent of BC3 graduates in its Class of 2020 who are at least 30 years old.

BC3 “was so accommodating for a nontraditional student,” Cashaw said. “I was older than most students, even the teachers.”

The disabled veteran volunteered at the Butler VA while making the dean’s list twice and president’s list once at BC3. Students with grade-point averages of 3.5 to 3.74 earn dean’s list recognition and those with grade-point averages of 3.75 or higher, president’s list honors.

“BC3 is the best place to go,” Cashaw said. “The classes are small and the teachers are all personable. They want to help you. They want you to succeed. And they mean it. You’re not another number. They actually listen to you. And they kept me encouraged to keep going. It was very uplifting to me.”

Cashaw is one of 31 student-veterans and 563 graduates in BC3’s Class of 2020. She accepted a full-time position with a Pittsburgh healthcare agency and said her education at BC3 has changed her life.

“It has made me more confident,” Cashaw said. “There are things that I can do.”

Her only nephew, Shaquan, of Clarion, son of Cashaw’s younger sister Beverly, and her only niece, Selena, of Ambridge, son of Cashaw’s older brother, David, are proud of their aunt, as would be parents Thomas and Ollie Mae, Cashaw said.

“I knew I had potential,” Cashaw said. “I knew that it was in myself.”

Youngest grad a student in 2-year-old Riv-Ell program

Also showing potential are nine high school students in BC3’s Class of 2020 who by completing the second Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program will receive a BC3 workplace certificate in entrepreneurship.

Grinnen is among students in the 2-year-old Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program for Lincoln and Riverside high schools. The program, a collaborative effort among BC3, the Community College of Beaver County and the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, blends classroom learning with real-world experience. Students who complete the program earn 16 tuition-free, transferable credits and a BC3 workplace certificate in entrepreneurship.

Students from Valencia and Kittanning earned two associate degrees and one certificate. Victoria Berzonski achieved degrees in criminology and in emergency services-police services option, and a certificate in emergency services-corrections option. Sara Peters earned degrees in business management and technical trades-cosmetology management option, and a workplace certificate in entrepreneurship.

BC3 will also graduate its second class of presidential scholars; 126 members of its Rho Phi chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, an international academic honor society; and 16 members of Delta Theta, its chapter of Kappa Beta Delta, an international honor society for business students.

Thirteen employees of Oberg Industries, a precision manufacturer in Freeport, will receive apprenticeship technology workplace certificates as a result of a program instructed onsite by BC3. Courses in the college’s 26-credit apprenticeship technology workplace certificate program, launched in fall 2016, are taught entirely at Oberg Industries.

BC3’s most popular associate degree to be awarded to its Class of 2020 is business administration; and its most popular certificate, medical coding and billing specialist.