

Former combat medic among BC3's largest graduating class of century

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Candice Marie Pennington, 36, of Renfrew, who served five years in the Army as a combat medic, will graduate from Butler County Community College on May 15 with an associate degree in Nursing, R.N. She is shown April 29 in the nursing skills lab on BC3's main campus.

(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College's Class of 2019 will be its largest of the century with 599 graduates – 14 more than in 2017, its previous top class since 2000.

Five-hundred-twenty-seven graduates will receive at least one associate degree, and 72 at least one certificate during BC3's commencement exercises, set for 7 p.m. May 15 in the Field House on BC3's main campus in Butler Township.

Among the 599 graduates are 32 student-veterans. A 70-year-old grandmother of three who is the Class of 2019's most senior graduate. A 35-year-old married mother of six. BC3's first two-sport All-American. Six high school students who achieved a Workplace Certificate in Entrepreneurship by completing the first Riv-ElI Entrepreneurship Program.

And Candice Marie Pennington, 36, a 2002 Butler Senior High School graduate who served five years in the Army as a combat medic and will receive an associate degree in Nursing, R.N. – a program, she says, that has “a terrific reputation for setting future nurses up to become incredible caretakers. The challenging academic load has prepared me for the hard work still ahead.”

“I love the community feeling”

That hard work includes pursuing a bachelor’s degree at a senior institution, then a master’s degree toward her goal of becoming a nurse educator.

“I love to help people attain the A-ha! moment,” said Pennington, of Renfrew. “That moment when the information presented to someone clicks and they feel more confident in the subject they were previously struggling with. I want to pass on my love of learning about the human body and how we, as nurses, care for people.”

Pennington said she also senses that caring on BC3’s main campus in Butler Township.

“I love the community feeling I get when walking from class to class,” Pennington said. “Having the time to say hi to people I pass rather than running across a massive campus to get to my next class is always nice.”

As is BC3’s affordability, said Pennington, who has been married for seven years and has an 11-year-old daughter.

Pennsylvania college students owe an average of \$36,193 in student-loan debt, the highest in the nation, LendEdu reported Aug. 8.

Seventy-five percent of BC3 graduates are debt-free.

Daughter looking forward to attending BC3

“BC3 is highly affordable and the nursing program has a great reputation,” Pennington said. “I am terrified of astronomical debt. The thought of being hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt as I enter the workforce is not something I ever wanted to endure.”

BC3 has the highest salary-to-cost ratio and the most affordable tuition among 43 regional colleges and universities, according to U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard data. BC3 has also been selected as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in three consecutive rankings by Schools.com.

“Year after year BC3 is ranked the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania and as a student, I agree,” said Pennington, vice president of membership of Rho Phi, BC3’s chapter of Phi Theta

Kappa, an international academic honor society. She is also a member of BC3's Student Veterans Association and of its nursing club.

"They continue to make improvements to the campus and offer classes and equipment that are suited to this technological day and age. At the same time they are able to keep the old traditions alive that makes a small campus community feel like home. My daughter is already looking forward to attending and I encourage all high schoolers I know to consider BC3 as their first stop to higher education."

Evans City woman most senior graduate

Seventeen BC3 graduates will receive two associate degrees, two will receive two certificates, and 13 will receive one associate degree and one certificate.

Evans City resident Deborah Carter, at 70 years, one month and 12 days on May 15 will be BC3's most senior graduate, 285 days more senior than Brenda Haney, of Cranberry Township. Carter will receive an associate degree in social work and Haney, in criminology.

Vanessa Eberle, 35, of Butler, a married mother of six, will receive an associate degree in psychology, as will her husband, Ethan, 41.

Mackenzie Craig, of Karns City, who since December was named a National Junior College Athletic Association Division III All-American in volleyball and in women's basketball, will receive an associate degree in criminology.

Ellwood City resident Mikayla Beachem, at 17 years, eight months and 22 days will be BC3's youngest graduate, 37 days younger than fellow Riv-Ell classmate Destiny DiMaggio, also of Ellwood City.

Ellwood City and Riverside high school students were able to participate in the first, yearlong Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program, a collaborative effort among BC3, the Community College of Beaver County and the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, which blended classroom learning with real-world experience. Students who completed the program earned 16 tuition-free, transferrable credits.

Past three graduating classes largest since 2000

BC3 will also graduate its second class of Presidential Scholars. Meghan Hyatt, of Butler, will receive an associate degree in mathematics; Kelly Kriley, of Butler, in chemistry; Drew Meier, of Fenelton, in electronics technology with CADD; Noah Pollock, of Chicora, in business administration; Claire Rodgers, of Saxonburg, in history; and Haley Vissari, of Renfrew, in early childhood education (Pre K-4).

The Presidential Scholars program is in its third year at BC3. The full-tuition President's Scholarship is presented to students in the Top 10 percent of their graduating class and who have achieved at least a 3.5 grade-point average at any of Butler County's public high schools. A cyber school student counted in those public schools' graduating classes is also eligible. Students must also enroll at BC3 in the first semester following their high school graduation to be eligible for the scholarship, and are required to take Scholars-only courses and maintain at least a 3.5 GPA at BC3.

More than 125 members of BC3's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, an international academic honor society, will graduate, as will 13 members of Delta Theta, BC3's chapter of Kappa Beta Delta, an international honor society for business students.

Eight students will receive from BC3 11 reverse-transfer degrees, an opportunity created in 2016 as part of an agreement among Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges and 14 Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institutions.

Seven 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. BC3's 26-credit apprenticeship technology workplace certificate program, launched in fall 2016, is taught entirely at Oberg Industries.

Dr. Steve Tyrell, president of North Country Community College, Saranac Lake, N.Y., will be the keynote speaker. Sandra J. Ihlenfeld, a 2007 BC3 graduate and executive director of the Butler YMCA, will be the distinguished alumni speaker.

BC3's three most recent graduating classes have been its largest of the century. The college's Class of 2017 had 585 graduates and of 2018, 578. BC3's Class of 2018 also had 32 student-veterans. Its class of 2012 had 34.