

BC3 achieves highest possible status in international academic honor society

“We are among the best,” Rho Phi adviser says

March 23, 2017

(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College’s chapter of Phi Theta Kappa has achieved the highest possible status in the prestigious international academic honor society, an adviser said Monday in also announcing two of its members have been selected to receive state and national scholarships.

Rho Phi, BC3’s chapter of a society that has 3.2 million members in nine nations, reached the ultimate five-star status – an increase from zero stars since she and Arlene Gardopee began as advisers in 2011, Morgan Rizzardi said.



Morgan Rizzardi (left) and Arlene Gardopee (right).

Tarah Schmidt, of Parker, a sophomore pursuing associate degrees in psychology and social work, and Lauren Denny, of Butler, a sophomore early childhood education major, have been selected to the All-Pennsylvania Academic Team, based largely on essays that connect what they have learned inside the classroom to an outside-of-classroom experience. They will receive full-tuition scholarships to any one of the 14 State System of Higher Education institutions.

Schmidt, a 2012 Moniteau High School graduate and Rho Phi vice president, and Denny, a 2015 Butler Area Senior High School graduate and BC3 Executive Council president, said Monday they would continue their education at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania.

Schmidt and Denny have also been selected to the 2017 Coca-Cola Community College Academic Team as Bronze Scholars and will receive \$1,000 scholarships. The BC3 students were among 1,800 applicants for 150 Coca-Cola scholarships, whose recipients were selected based on scores earned in the All-USA Community College Academic Team competition.

“I feel absolutely blessed”

Phi Theta Kappa is based in Jackson, Miss., and its Middle States Region, to which BC3 belongs, in Wilmington, Del. Its members must have at least a 3.5 grade-point average.



Tarah Schmidt (left) and Lauren Denny (right).

“It is such a blessing to be chose for these,” said Denny, 20. “I try to work really hard and really understand what I am learning at BC3. I love BC3. It has been wonderful to see how BC3 has nourished my love of learning.”

Schmidt, 23, who last weekend attended the 30th convention and awards ceremony of Phi Theta Kappa’s Middle States Region in Long Branch, N.J., said she wept when she learned she had been awarded the scholarships.

“I was in the car with my mother when I got the phone call, and I started crying,” she said. “I put a lot of effort into it. I practically paid for school all my own. It’s all on me. To get these scholarships is just a relief. I feel absolutely blessed.”

As selections to the All-Pennsylvania Academic Team, Denny and Schmidt are scheduled to attend the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges’ banquet and awards ceremony April 3-4 in Camp Hill.

Denny’s essay focused on connecting her education in early childhood education to creating a business in which she provides private flute lessons; and Schmidt, on her studies and how they related to her work at an in-patient facility for those with drug and alcohol addictions.

“It shows you are a committed chapter”

Dr. Nick Neupauer, BC3 president, is thrilled with Rho Phi’s five-star ranking.

“I am so incredibly pleased with our local chapter of Phi Theta Kappa,” Neupauer said. “What a phenomenal job this year’s group has done, along with those from the past several years, to go from a zero-star all the way up to a five-star. Momentum has been built with the help of some very good advisers, and I could not be more proud.”

Rizzardi cites her chapter’s Top 10 finishes in the Middle States Region in Rho Phi’s Honors in Action project – titled “Combating Addiction and Mental Illness on the College Campus” – and its Community College Completion Corps work as projects that catapulted BC3 to a five-star status.

“I am over the moon,” said Rizzardi, BC3’s associate director of admissions. “Being a five-star chapter means we are among the best. It shows that we have commitment and follow-through, that we can start from scratch and continue to build our way up.”

“It brings you to the top level of recognition,” Gardopee said. “It shows you are a committed chapter, one of the best in the region.”

There are 80 Phi Theta Kappa chapters in a Middle States Region that encompasses Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.

“What makes us proudest,” said Gardopee, who teaches Spanish classes at BC3, “is the way that we have progressed so quickly, in going from zero stars to five stars in six-year period.”

BC3’s Rho Phi chapter was founded in April 1968.