

BC3 receives \$2.22M in public-private support for Ford City site

County and state funds, local business commitments designated toward new BC3 @ Armstrong location

Jan. 7, 2021



An automobile passes by 1100 Fourth Ave. in Ford City in this Thursday, Sept. 26, 2019, file photo. The site is the former home of Ford City Junior-Senior High School and future home of BC3 @ Armstrong.

(Butler, PA) Armstrong County commissioners today approved a memorandum of understanding with Butler County Community College that pledges \$250,000 to BC3 toward the construction of an approximately 12,500-square-foot facility in Ford City to succeed a location the college has outgrown a half-mile away.

The college has also been awarded a \$1.75 million state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant spearheaded by state Rep. Jeff Pyle, and has received \$220,000 in private commitments toward a Ford City facility intended to accommodate an enrollment increase as high as 426 percent at BC3's 5½-year-old location in nearby Manor Township.

Commissioners Don Myers, Jason Renshaw and Pat Fabian announced Armstrong County's agreement with BC3 during the board's scheduled public meeting in Kittanning. Funds will be allocated from the county's general reserves, Myers said.

The state's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grants fund the acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational and historical improvement projects, according to the Pennsylvania Office of the Budget.

Projects must have a regional or multi-jurisdictional impact, and generate substantial increases or maintain current levels of employment, tax revenues or other measures of economic activity, according to the state Office of the Budget.

“Absolutely great public-private partnership”

The state-of-the-art BC3 @ Armstrong facility will be built at 1100 Fourth Avenue, former home of the century-old Ford City Junior-Senior High School, which was razed in late 2018.

BC3 @ Armstrong's Ford City location will also revive a since blighted property, said state Sen. Joe Pittman, R-41, whose district includes Armstrong and Indiana counties, and parts of Butler and Westmoreland counties.

“I think what I am most proud of,” college President Dr. Nick Neupauer said, “is the absolutely great public-private partnership. You have state dollars, you have private dollars and you have a local commitment from the county commissioners. This is the truest form of the town and gown.

“This location, which has historical value, is literally in the heart of Ford City. We might even have some students who will move to Armstrong County to get the full overall college experience. And the benefit of BC3 is that we will be helping businesses with their workforce.”

Elected officials and business executives echoed Neupauer.



Top row, from left: State Rep. Jeff Pyle, R-60; state Sen. Joe Pittman, R-41; and Dr. Nick Neupauer, president, Butler County Community College. Bottom row, from left, Don Myers, chair, Armstrong County commissioners; Jason Renshaw, vice chair, Armstrong County commissioners; and Pat Fabian, secretary, Armstrong County commissioners.

“A huge thing for attracting people”

Snyder Associated Companies, Kittanning, will gift \$100,000 to the BC3 Education Foundation to help to found BC3’s Ford City location, said Mark Snyder, corporate secretary.

BelleFlex Technologies and PulFlex Technologies, Ford City, will contribute \$70,000, said Bruce Kinney, CEO, and Scott McDowell, president; and NexTier Bank will provide \$50,000, said Clem Rosenberger, CEO and president.

A BC3 @ Armstrong location in Ford City will appeal to students, invigorate downtown, increase tax revenue and be used to market Armstrong County which, Myers said, “is going to be a huge thing for attracting people here. This is positive growth for our county with increased marketing that will attract others. Very exciting.



Top row, from left: Aaron Poole, chief administrator, Armstrong County; Clem Rosenberger, CEO and president, NexTier Bank; and Bruce Kinney, CEO, BelleFlex Technologies and PulFlex Technologies. Bottom row, from left, Scott McDowell, president, BelleFlex Technologies and PulFlex Technologies and a Butler County Community College trustee since 2012; Chris Lunn, chief financial officer, Nonprofit Development Corp.; and Karen Zapp, director, BC3 @ Armstrong.

“When you have a facility such as this, you will have people coming and going,” said Myers, the commissioners’ chair. “And it will be different people, because the (BC3 associate degree) programs are two years long. You have our people plus outside people coming in.”

“A great step forward” for county

Commissioners are “always looking for an economic boon,” said Renshaw, the commissioners’ vice chair, adding that the Ford City location will draw students and visitors to downtown businesses.

“This,” Renshaw said, “is a win-win for everybody here. I think it is a great step forward for Armstrong County.”

Restaurants, banks, housing and convenience stores all stand to profit, said Fabian, the commissioners’ secretary.

“Any time you increase your foot traffic, or traffic into a community, there are going to be dollars spent,” Fabian said. “That’s a good thing for Ford City. That’s a good thing for Armstrong County. ... Armstrong County deserves this kind of partnership with BC3.”

Ford City is located near the center of Armstrong County, and represents one point on a geographic triangle shared with Armstrong Junior-Senior High School, Kittanning, and Lenape Technical School, Manor Township, state officials said.



BC3 @ Armstrong students congregate in the outer office of Karen Zapp, BC3 @ Armstrong director, in this Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2016, file photo

“We think that triangle is going to be an incubator for jobs,” said Pyle, R-60, whose district includes parts of Armstrong, Butler and Indiana counties. “Almost immediately, all the amenities are going to benefit from” BC3 @ Armstrong’s relocation to Ford City.

BC3 is “super cost-effective”

Pittman said “the ultimate partnership” of state, county and private support that will help to fund BC3 @ Armstrong’s relocation to the borough “is going to, in my opinion, spur additional development in the Ford City area.”

“And it is going to give students in Armstrong County a new educational opportunity, which,” Pittman said, “I think is critically important.”

Eighty percent of the college’s Class of 2020 graduated debt-free.

BC3’s salary-to-cost ratio was the highest among more than 40 regional public and private colleges and universities in 2018 and 2019, according to the most recent analyses of U.S. Department of Education data conducted by the Pittsburgh Business Times.

BC3 is “super cost-effective in getting people developed for walking into jobs,” Pyle said. “The student-loan debt isn’t as heavy at BC3 as it would be” at other area institutions of higher education.

BC3, Pyle added, represents “A chance for people to better themselves.”

Industry to “lean on BC3” for help

Many of Snyder Associated Companies’ subsidiaries are located in Armstrong County, said Snyder, corporate secretary.

“We have employees who have children who are looking for higher education,” Snyder said. “BC3 has always provided a quality education for those students who choose to attend BC3.”

BC3’s location in Ford City will “start to generate commerce,” Snyder said. “The more positive things that are happening in town, the more benefit there will be. There is a lot of industry in the borough right now, and I am sure they will lean on BC3 to help provide education for their employees as well as for the employees’ families.”

“You have to help make it happen”

Among those industries are BelleFlex and PulFlex, Ford City subsidiaries of Blair Strip Steel, a 238-year-old New Castle specialty mill.

The 11-year-old BelleFlex manufactures specialty Belleville springs, and the 3-year-old PulFlex, composite pultrusions.

“You don’t become 238 years old without planning long-term,” said Kinney, CEO of Blair Strip Steel and of its subsidiaries.

“When we take a long-term approach looking at these two new companies in Ford City, that needs to include looking five, 10, 20 years down the road and helping to create a trained and knowledgeable workforce,” Kinney said.

“We’re ecstatic to partner with BC3 to establish the new BC3 location in Ford City. You have to invest in it. You can’t just hope. You have to help make it happen.”

A BC3 @ Armstrong location in Ford City represents “a great place to start from an economic development standpoint,” said McDowell, president of Blair Strip Steel and of its subsidiaries, and a BC3 trustee since 2012.

“There’s no doubt in my mind that people in Ford City are looking to start to generate growth,” McDowell said. “And how does that start? It starts with something like this.



Paige Toy, of Kittanning, is shown in class at BC3 @ Armstrong in this Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018, file photo.

“When you look at Ford City, I think it creates a win in a number of ways. Economically for the community, it’s a win. For the businesses in that area, with a pool of talent coming out of the college, is a win. And most importantly, for the students, it’s a big win.”

Partnership to “benefit the area”

BC3 is “certainly a strong educational institution that is part of the fabric of the community in Butler and in surrounding counties,” said Rosenberger, NexTier’s CEO and president. “It brings the opportunity of a quality education at an affordable price to many residents in the surrounding communities.”

NexTier Bank, which has locations in Armstrong and Butler counties, has always been proud of its efforts to support “the communities that we live and work in,” Rosenberger said.

“Butler and Armstrong counties are the roots of our institution. So the partnership with BC3 and Armstrong County to make this extension into Ford City certainly is going to benefit the area, the communities,” Rosenberger said.

Facility to cost approximately \$4.5M

BC3 @ Armstrong, which opened in 2015, occupies approximately 2,000 square feet of dedicated space and shares other areas within the Lenape Technical School’s NexTier Adult Learning Center, Manor Township.

The debut of BC3 @ Armstrong followed the establishment of the college’s additional locations in Cranberry Township, Butler County, in 1987; New Castle, Lawrence County, in 1989; Hermitage, Mercer County, in 1995; and Brockway, Jefferson County, in 2013.

BC3 generated \$147.5 million in added income to Butler County’s economy in the 2016-17 fiscal year, according to an economic impact analysis conducted by Emsi, an Idaho research company that has completed more than 1,800 impact studies for educational institutions since 2000.

The college was also recognized in 2018 with a Lawrence County Regional Chamber of Commerce and Lawrence County Economic Development Corp. Economic Development Impact Award for BC3’s additional location in New Castle; and in 2011 with a Shenango Valley Chamber of Commerce Phoenix Award for BC3’s additional location in Hermitage, Mercer County.

BC3 created its additional locations to serve under-represented counties in Pennsylvania with higher education. BC3 @ Armstrong saves students an otherwise 30-mile, 40-minute drive to BC3’s main campus in Butler Township, Butler County.

Enrollment at BC3 @ Armstrong since 2015 has increased from 23 students to as many as 121. BC3 @ Armstrong graduated its first students with associate degrees in May 2017.

The college will be the sole tenant of an approximately \$4.5 million facility in Ford City, said Jim Hrabosky, BC3's vice president for administration and finance.

Facility could open in fall 2022

The Nonprofit Development Corp., Butler, will own the facility, said Chris Lunn, the organization's chief financial officer. The Nonprofit Development Corp. is the subgrantee of the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant awarded to BC3.

Groundbreaking could begin this summer and the facility could open by fall 2022, said Brian Opitz, BC3's executive director of operations.

The single-story BC3 @ Armstrong facility in Ford City will house approximately four classrooms, a multipurpose room, a natural science laboratory, student meeting space, and staff and faculty offices, Opitz said.

The college in October 2019 announced intentions to relocate BC3 @ Armstrong from Manor Township to Ford City to accommodate the increase in enrollment.

"I think from the beginning, we all knew this was a good thing for the college, but it's a great thing for the Ford City community," Lunn said. "BC3 is so ingrained in the communities that it goes into."

Karen Zapp, director of BC3 @ Armstrong, said BC3's current home in Manor Township was a "great place to begin."

"And we've enjoyed the small, kind of cozy atmosphere that we have had, which gives our students the opportunity to get to know each other and learn about college in a friendly environment," Zapp said.

"We're hoping to expand that into our larger facility."