

# Brr-ave BC3 students learn the ropes in ice rescues

Associate degree program offers chance for state emergency response certification

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Kyra Costar, of Hermitage, a park and recreation management student at Butler County Community College, grasps a tether Feb. 17 on BC3's main campus in Butler Township as part of ice rescue and emergency response technician certification offered through BC3's program and from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

(Butler, PA) The air temperature is 24 degrees Fahrenheit, feeling more like 19 in this breeze, and the water, just under this 4-inch mantle of ice, is 32.

Across campus, her contemporaries enrolled in Butler County Community College's 54 other associate degree programs are at this moment indoors, dry, warm. At least they're not here. Not out here. And certainly not about to inch stomach-down atop the college's Public Safety Training Facility pond toward a 6-foot by 4-foot pool.

Kyra Costar is the first of 12 BC3 park and recreation management program students on this Feb. 17 afternoon who will also drop into the 17-foot-deep water exposed by chainsaw an hour earlier.

The 20-year-old from Mercer County is pursuing ice rescue and emergency response technician certification through BC3's program and from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Over the next 40 minutes, Costar will use her elbows pressed atop the frozen ledge to repeat pulling herself onto the ice shelf.

Then drop back into the water.

She'll plant the spiked end of a 6-foot staff into the frozen ledge and repeat pulling herself onto the ice shelf.

Then drop back into the water.

She'll stab the spiked ends of 4-inch wooden ice awls into the frozen ledge and repeat pulling herself onto the ice shelf.

Then drop back into the water.

She has learned to rescue herself. Trey Barto will now learn how to rescue another.

Barto, likewise protected by a drysuit and personal flotation device, will likewise tap the 6-foot staff onto the ice ahead of his footsteps, listening for inconsistencies, then kneel and slide on his stomach, distributing his weight, to inch toward Costar 20 yards offshore.



Ross Moser, of Butler, a park and recreation management student at Butler County Community College, uses ice awls to pull himself onto an ice shelf Feb. 17 on BC3's main campus in Butler Township as part of ice rescue and emergency response technician certification offered through BC3's program and from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.



Trey Barto, of Butler, a park and recreation management student at Butler County Community College, grasps a tether and is pulled onto an ice shelf Feb. 17 on BC3's main campus in Butler Township as part of ice rescue and emergency response technician certification offered through BC3's program and from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

He'll practice pulling Costar onto the ice shelf using the tethered end of the 6-foot staff. Then enter the 32-degree water himself, where he will connect Costar to a harness, later to a U-shaped ice rescue sling, enabling both to be pulled to safety by classmates grasping the other end of a 3/8-inch polypropylene throw line from the snow-covered shore.

## "I learned to step out of my comfort zone"

"This group," said Chris Calhoun, a BC3 park and recreation management professor and technical resource specialist and rescue technician with the Butler County Water Rescue Team 300, "is learning the tactics. With these skill sets, we have to do a thorough job to the best of our abilities to teach them because the next time they may use these skills may be an actual rescue."

Costar chose BC3's career program to prepare for work in recreational management in Colorado. Barto did so to become an officer with the state Game Commission. Silas Bruno, to become a ranger with the National Park Service and Ellie Robinson, to become a park ranger with the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.



Chris Calhoun, right, a Butler County Community College park and recreation management professor and technical resource specialist and rescue technician with the Butler County Water Rescue Team 300, discusses with his BC3 students ice rescue and emergency response technician certification Feb. 17 on BC3's main campus in Butler Township.



Eugene Citrone, left, and Silas Bruno, both of Rural Valley and park and recreation management students at Butler County Community College, are shown Feb. 17 on BC3's main campus in Butler Township during ice rescue and emergency response technician certification offered through BC3's program and from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.



They are among the dozen 19- to 37-year-olds pursuing the ice rescue and emergency response technician certification from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission through BC3's four-credit park safety and visitor services course.



Josh Timblin, of Butler, right, a park and recreation management student at Butler County Community College, is pulled onto an ice shelf Feb. 17 on BC3's main campus in Butler Township as part of ice rescue and emergency response technician certification offered through BC3's program and from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Assisting is Shayla Lynam, a BC3 park and recreation management student from Butler.

BC3's two-year career program also offers opportunities for certifications in advanced line systems rescue, CPR and AED for the professional rescuer, first responder, water rescue and emergency response, wildland firefighter training and in other areas.



Ross Moser, of Butler, a park and recreation management student at Butler County Community College, rolls onto an ice shelf Feb. 17 on BC3's main campus in Butler Township as part of ice rescue and emergency response technician certification offered through BC3's program and from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

Ice rescue and emergency response technician certification requires proficiency in ice travel, self-rescue, ice-based rescue, boat- and platform-based rescue and direct-contact rescue – “They have to demonstrate competence in all skills,” Calhoun said – and that students score 80 percent or higher on a written test.

“Having this experience will help me with my career goals,” said Costar, a Hermitage resident and 2018 graduate of Hickory High School. “I learned to step out of my comfort zone and know that I could do something like that.”

As did Barto, 20, of Butler and a 2019 graduate of Butler Area Senior High School.

“I definitely was a little nervous to get in that ice at first only because I have never been in a situation like that,” Barto said. “It was a little nerve-racking at first, but after a while you kind of get more used to it and feel comfortable with it. I was glad to overcome that fear of getting in that ice.”

## “Ice condition can deteriorate very quickly”

The college’s park safety and visitor services course instructs students in basic law enforcement and in rescue techniques that apply to park and recreation areas. The course is required in the second semester of BC3’s park and recreation management law enforcement option track and in the fourth semester of its general option track. Each track requires 61 credits to earn an associate degree.



Over and over, Costar and Barto and Bruno and Robinson and their classmates practiced pulling themselves and one another onto a frozen ledge that would become water covered and begin to soften over the afternoon. Ultimately they practiced rescues using a 12-foot-long inflatable rapid deployment craft.

Kyra Costar, of Hermitage, a park and recreation management student at Butler County Community College, is shown Feb. 17 on BC3’s main campus in Butler Township during ice rescue and emergency response technician certification offered through BC3’s program and from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

“The challenge in Pennsylvania is that ice conditions can be good for a very short period of time, and then go bad very fast,” Calhoun said. “People could go out recreating on the ice or walking on the ice early in the morning and maybe not have issues. But if the sun comes out and the temperatures rise, and there is water on the surface, that ice condition can deteriorate very quickly.

“On their way back they fall through because it has changed,” Calhoun said. “It changed in just that short amount of time.”

The training is important “so if we are ever put into an emergency situation, we’re prepared,” said Robinson, 19, of Grove City and a 2019 graduate of Grove City Area High School. “We can stay calm and understand what we need to do to help people out.”

Calhoun, who also serves as a member of the Pennsylvania Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team and as the lead water-rescue instructor trainer for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, will next teach BC3 park and recreation management students how to help people out at McConnells Mill State Park in Lawrence County.

“BC3 really has everything we need”

Students taking the park safety and visitor services course will pursue certifications in water rescue and emergency response April 14, and in advanced line systems rescue April 21 and April 28.

“BC3,” Barto said, “really has everything we need to get us a good jump start in our career.”

His career will include search and rescue, said Bruno, a 2018 graduate of Lenape Technical School and a resident of Rural Valley who wants to work for the National Park Service.

“So knowing how to rescue somebody in all sorts of situations, including ice rescue, is very important,” Bruno said. “This was actual ice. Some of the ropes were freezing. When you had to disconnect out of the system, the harness and hardware was frozen.

“This was learning how to coordinate getting someone out there, making sure the line tenders are doing what they’re supposed to do, paying attention to what your rescuer is doing, how the victim is, how their condition is.

“It was paying attention to everything.”

View BC3’s ice-rescue training at <https://youtu.be/oQZGlGMFX9w>

Learn more about BC3’s park and recreation management program at [bc3.edu/prm](http://bc3.edu/prm)