

Growing BC3 @ Armstrong eyes new home in 2021

Spike in enrollment leads to site in downtown Ford City

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

(Ford City, PA) BC3 @ Armstrong's fall 2021 move to a projected \$5 million, 25,000-square-foot facility reflects an increase in enrollment as high as 426 percent at a site debuting four years ago to serve under-represented counties in Pennsylvania with higher education, and may simultaneously spur economic growth in downtown Ford City, Butler County Community College administrators and BC3 community partners said.

BC3 @ Armstrong, the newest of BC3's additional locations in Butler, Jefferson, Lawrence and Mercer counties, will lease up to 17,500 square feet within a two-story building to be owned by the Nonprofit Development Corp., Butler, and to be constructed on nearly 2.7 acres at 1100 Fourth Ave.

The site is the former home of Ford City Junior-Senior High School, which opened in 1909, closed in 2015 and was razed in late 2018, officials said. Its final senior class in the 2014-15 academic year had 89 students.

BC3 @ Armstrong opened in fall 2015 one half-mile away, at 104 Armstrong St., Manor Township, saving its first 23 students enrolled in five on-site classes an otherwise 30-mile, 40-minute drive to BC3's main campus in Butler Township, Butler County. BC3's additional location has since enrolled as many as 121 students in up to 33 on-site classes.

While BC3 @ Armstrong's current home within Lenape Technical School's NexTier Adult Learning Center has served BC3 well, said BC3 President Dr. Nick Neupauer, BC3 @ Armstrong has outgrown the space available.

"When you see students really having nowhere to go between classes and within a smaller facility, what we are doing is the right thing to do,"

Neupauer said. "It's exciting that we can bring the strength of Butler County Community College into Ford City in an expanded capacity to serve the students of Armstrong County."

Added Jim Hrabosky, BC3's vice president for administration and finance: "Our enrollment has grown to the point to where we no longer have the sufficient space to be able to do what we need to do. And we're expanding our presence."



Students walk toward BC3 @ Armstrong, within Lenape Technical School's NexTier Adult Learning Center, in Manor Township, Armstrong County, on Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2017. BC3 @ Armstrong will move to 1100 Fourth Ave., Ford City, in 2021.



BC3 @ Armstrong students congregate in the outer office of Karen Zapp, BC3 @ Armstrong director, in this Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2016, file photo inside Butler County Community College's additional location in Manor Township, Armstrong County. From left, Liz Slage, of Adrian; Quentin Fox, of Ford City; Ciara Stone, of Dayton; Joshua Gregory, of Freeport; and Sam Biesinger, of Ford City. Slage, Biesinger and Gregory have graduated from BC3, and Stone plans to earn two associate degrees in December. BC3 @ Armstrong's 2021 move to downtown Ford City could provide students with more student-friendly areas, officials said.

Students “deserve a college experience”

BC3 @ Armstrong students “deserve a college experience that we hope to provide in a new local facility that will be easily accessible to all Armstrong County and surrounding county students,” said Director Karen Zapp, whose current facility includes three classrooms and two offices.

“It will be exciting to have more student-friendly areas for students who enjoy being here. Sometimes it gets a little crowded because we have a lot of students coming and going. There aren’t many areas for them to relax and hang out other than in our office.”

The Nonprofit Development Corp., which owns the buildings in which the Butler-headquartered Alliance for Nonprofit Resources and Center for Community Resources operate, has agreed to purchase the land owned by the Armstrong School District, said Chris Lunn, the nonprofit organization’s chief fiscal officer.

The Nonprofit Development Corp. plans to select DPH Architecture, Canfield, Ohio, to design the building in which BC3 will occupy part of the first floor and all of the second, Lunn said.

A third community partner may also be housed within the facility.

DPH Architecture designed the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center on BC3’s main campus, and the renovation of BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, Butler County.

The BC3 @ Armstrong project is expected to address the need for dedicated classrooms, learning spaces, computer rooms and a science and chemistry lab, BC3 administrators said.

A science and chemistry lab at the new site would enable BC3 @ Armstrong to provide courses in descriptive chemistry, “which is highly in demand and at this time can be taken only at main campus,” Zapp said – and in anatomy and physiology, and in biology, which are currently offered in labs at Lenape Technical School one block from the NextTier facility, according to Zapp.



Students apply to BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, Butler County, during an open house for Butler County Community College’s additional location on Thursday, April 11, 2019. The open house also served as a grand re-opening for BC3 @ Cranberry, whose renovation was designed by DPH Architecture, Canfield, Ohio. The Nonprofit Development Corp., Butler, plans to select DPH to design BC3 @ Armstrong’s 2021 location at 1100 Fourth Ave., Ford City.

BC3's additional location could also expand its menu of courses to nearly 40 in the new building, Zapp said.

BC3 @ Armstrong, which graduated its first students with associate degrees in May 2017, offers programs in business administration, general studies and psychology. Next fall it plans to add social work, and, in 2021 at the new facility, programs in criminology and secondary education-social sciences concentration, Zapp said.

Execs laud community partnership with BC3

The Alliance for Nonprofit Resources and the Center for Community Resources will also utilize the building to offer services in Ford City, Lunn said.

Those services include ANR providing organizations with support to fulfill their missions with assistance in information technology, human resources and accounting, said Mike Robb, executive director of the Nonprofit Development Corp. CCR, he said, assists individuals in finding help and information for mental health, intellectual disabilities, substance abuse and other human service needs.

The Nonprofit Development Corp.'s successful partnership with BC3 will continue with the new BC3 @ Armstrong location, Lunn and Robb said.

"From our perspective, the Nonprofit Development Corp. and BC3 have a track record of partnering," Lunn said of the 54-year-old BC3 creating its first presence in downtown Butler in August 2018 by leasing space in the Alliance for Nonprofit Resources building at 127 S. Main St., where the college houses the office of its coordinator of community leadership initiatives. "We've done great things so far with that partnership."

That partnership, Robb said, means "taking care of the college first. This site (in Ford City) is our primary pledge, responsibility and investment to have the surety that the college has the space that it needs to fulfill what it wants to do there."



Paige Toy, of Kittanning, is shown in class at BC3 @ Armstrong in this Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018, file photo. Toy graduated from BC3 in May and has transferred to Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

2021 site key to “triangle” of job creation

BC3 @ Armstrong’s move to downtown Ford City represents “a great opportunity for the county as a whole,” said state Sen. Joe Pittman, R-41, whose district includes Armstrong and Indiana counties, and parts of Butler and Westmoreland counties.

“What I like about this is that it not only provides affordable educational opportunities, but helps to revitalize a piece of property in the heart of Ford City, which is critical.”

The heart of Ford City is located in the middle of a “triangle” encompassing BC3

@ Armstrong’s 2021 location, Armstrong Junior-Senior High School and Lenape Technical School, said state Rep. Jeff Pyle, R-60, whose district includes parts of Armstrong, Butler and Indiana counties.

“And we think in that little triangle is where we can create tomorrow’s jobs.”

Superintendent Chris DeVivo said his Armstrong School District has had a “very good partnership” with BC3 offering college-level courses in Armstrong County.

“The new property will benefit our students in the Armstrong School District,” he said, “and branching out will benefit all of our students. This is a very good partnership, a win-win for all involved.”

Council president: “A major step forward”

Among those winners will be Ford City and its population of 2,900, according to Carol Fenyes, borough council president, who said she envisions BC3 @ Armstrong students visiting downtown restaurants, renting housing from landlords and finding full- or part-time employment near the 2021 site.



BC3 @ Armstrong student Brittany Wells, of Smicksburg, studies in BC3 @ Armstrong Director Karen Zapp’s outer office in this Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018, file photo. Wells plans to graduate in May with an associate degree in business administration and a certificate in accounting skills.

“This is just a major step forward for us,” Fenyes said. “We’re in the middle of an economic revitalization in Ford City, and this will be such a boon to the area. This is a major project for Ford City.”

Approximately 100 people worked at Ford City Junior-Senior High School before it closed, said Pat Fabian, chairman of the Armstrong County commissioners, as “educators, principals, maintenance and cafeteria staff. People who came into town. People who spent money. ... There will be a benefit all the way around, not only for Ford City, but on a countywide level too.”

BC3’s presence in Armstrong County “is just priceless,” said Jason Renshaw, an Armstrong County commissioner. “They see a need here, as we do. And they are willing to invest. We are all willing to invest time, money and patience. These things take time to help the citizens of the county and businesses. It will help to build a better workforce.”

That workforce is greatly needed regionally, “if not nationally,” said George Skamai, an Armstrong County commissioner. “I’m very pleased that this educational expansion is occurring.”

As is Mike Coonley, who said Ford City’s current workforce will also prosper from BC3 @ Armstrong’s move downtown.

“A great vibrancy” to Ford City

“The sheer number of people who would be coming into the downtown area every day would be impactful,” said Coonley, executive director of the Armstrong County Industrial Development Council, whose agency cleared the site and brokered the sale.

“Students and faculty will be in the town, walking, seeing other people, meeting for coffee. They will be getting their lunch. ... The more vibrant the downtown, the more attractive the downtown is overall. You have the ability to bring more people in and create a more impactful economy.”



Haley Bowser, of Spring Church, throws a bag while playing cornhole with other BC3 @ Armstrong students in this Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2016, file photo outside Butler County Community College’s additional location in Manor Township, Armstrong County. BC3 @ Armstrong’s 2021 move to downtown Ford City could result in students visiting downtown restaurants, renting housing from landlords and finding full- or part-time employment near 1100 Fourth Ave., officials said.

Lunn, the chief financial officer of the Nonprofit Development Corp., said, “I think what we’re going to be able to do for the Ford City area is going to be amazing as far as economic development and bringing people into downtown Ford City.”

Officials examined multiple locations in the Ford City area before selecting the site at 1100 Fourth Ave., Neupauer said.

“It is incredibly exciting for us,” Neupauer said. “It will bring a new clientele to the Ford City area. Students, faculty and staff will be able to frequent the local restaurants, coffee shops and establishments in downtown Ford City. And we’re certain it’ll bring a great vibrancy to that area.”