

NEW CASTLE NEWS

Ellwood native becomes BC3's longest-serving president Nov. 15, 2021

Today, Dr. Nick Neupauer becomes the longest-serving president in the history of western Pennsylvania's first community college.

Neupauer, Butler County Community College's eighth president, passed the tenure of Dr. Thomas Ten Hoeve, the college's second president.

Ten Hoeve was named BC3's president in May 1970, five years after the institution of higher education was founded, and served 5,219 days to September 1984. Neupauer began Aug. 1, 2007.

Neupauer's current 14-year-plus tenure as president at the same institution is more than double the recent national average of 6.5 years. It is also longer than that of any current president among Pennsylvania's 14 other community colleges, its 14 public four-year institutions and its four state-related institutions.

The tenure of a college or university president can be affected by what Ten Hoeve described as the "24/7 challenge."

"You're there during the day, during a lot of evening events and of course, there are a lot of emergencies that come up," said Ten Hoeve, 86, of Holland, Mich. "Colleges and universities operate 24/7. You are, as President Truman once said, 'where the buck stops.' It can be tiring."

"And if you are not prepared for this being a lifestyle, if you treat it like a job, you won't last long," said Dr. Robert Smith, 76, of Franklin, Tenn., Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania's president from 2002-2012.

"It is a lifestyle. You have to be prepared for the 24/7. You have to be prepared for always being in the public light. You have to be prepared, as the saying goes, to be above the tree line, which makes you a much easier target."

Ellwood City native

Neupauer, a native of Ellwood City, was selected at 40 as BC3's president by the college's board of trustees.

Trustees have four times renewed the contract of the chief executive officer under whose leadership the college has created additional locations in western Pennsylvania counties underserved with higher education, has received six \$1 million gifts, has nearly tripled assets in its foundation to \$24.3 million, and has been selected as the top community college in Pennsylvania six times since 2015.

"When I was president starting in 1970, I would characterize my presidency as one of providing early stability and development of the institution," Ten Hoeve said. "Now, at this era, I believe that Dr. Neupauer has provided excellent enrichment, and expansion, of the institution with financial stability."

Stability in an institution of higher education's top office, said Elizabeth Bolden, president and chief executive officer of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, "is important because the leadership role of a community college president is all about communication and relationships in the broader region that they serve.

"And you cannot establish those kinds of relationships and trust if there is not stability in the leadership."

Janice Phillips Larrick said she asked Neupauer how long he planned to serve as BC3's leader when she considered a \$1 million gift to the BC3 Education Foundation on behalf of the Janice Phillips Larrick Charitable Trust in 2017.

"I had a father-in-law who built a lot of things," she said. "I didn't want to get stuck in the middle of something and then have a (new) president come in and undo it. That can so easily happen. So my question was, 'How long will you continue to be here? Are you interested in moving on in the near future or do you plan on staying here?'"

Phillips Larrick's gift will help to fund the Victor K. Phillips Nursing and Allied Health Building on BC3's main campus. BC3 held a ceremonial groundbreaking Oct. 20.

Additional locations

BC3 under Neupauer in 2008 created BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, an additional location in Lawrence County that has often been BC3's most student-populated; in 2013, BC3 @ Brockway in Jefferson County, an additional location also that serves students from Clarion, Clearfield and Elk counties; and in 2015, BC3 @ Armstrong near Ford City.

BC3 @ Brockway in 2018 became the only BC3 additional location to offer a career program in registered nursing to address a shortage in the high-priority occupation in six northern Pennsylvania counties.

BC3 @ Armstrong held a ceremonial groundbreaking Sept. 24 for a relocated facility in Ford City that will accommodate an increase in enrollment and, elected officials and business leaders have said, will help to revitalize the borough's downtown.

"By Nick's expanding, he not only served underserved ar-

reas, which is a value in and of itself," Smith said, "but he also then created a revenue stream that made it a lot easier for BC3 to do its mission and achieve the vision that Nick had."

Said Bolden: "The most successful presidents realize their college is part of a larger ecosystem in the commonwealth, and they realize the importance of being aware of changes in that ecosystem.

"I think it is very tempting for a lot of leaders just to look inside at the college and say, 'I know what I want to do for the college.' But Nick is keenly aware of keeping his finger on the pulse of what is going on in the larger community.

"As a result, I think BC3 has been able to move alongside the changes in the region and in the state and remain relevant for so long because he has the foresight to understand that."

BC3 has 530 employees, and 2,545 students enrolled this fall in associate degree or certificate programs held on its main campus in Butler Township or at its additional locations that include BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, Butler County; and BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage, Mercer County. The college enrolls more than 20,000 credit and noncredit students each year.

Neupauer graduated in 1985 from Lincoln High School in Ellwood City. He earned a bachelor's degree from Penn State University, a master's degree from Clarion University of Pennsylvania and a doctorate from West Virginia University.

'The complete cycle'

Neupauer began at BC3 as the dean of humanities and social science in 1999, and later served as vice president for academic affairs.

"So he is the only one who has gone through the complete cycle to president on the BC3 campus," said David Huseman, a professor in BC3's liberal arts division who has worked at BC3 for 54 years and for all eight BC3 presidents. "Everyone else was brought in from another institution to become president."

The average tenure of a college or university president nationally at his or her institution as of 2016 was 6.5 years, according to the eighth CEO tenure and retention study published by the Community College League of California in 2018.

The BC3 Education Foundation since 2014 has also received \$1 million gifts from Robert R. Heaton, John L. Wise III and family, former state Sen. Tim Shaffer, Concordia Lutheran Ministries and from a donor who requested to remain anonymous.

BC3 has been ranked as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania since 2015 by Schools.com, BestColleges.com and by Niche.com, each of which factored into their decisions information about BC3 from the U.S. Department of Education.

Dr. Michael Driscoll has served as president of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, a Pennsylvania public four-year institution, since 2012. Dr. Eric Barron has served as president of Penn State University, a Pennsylvania state-related institution, since 2014.

Dr. James A. Lawson served as BC3's first president, from 1965-1969. He was followed by Ten Hoeve; Dr. Frederick W. Woodward, 1986-1988; Dr. William N. Price, 1989-1990; Dr. Thaddeus Penar, 1991-1993; Dr. Fred Bartok, 1994-2002; and Dr. Cynthia Azari, 2002-2006.

President lauds wife

Neupauer said he attributes his tenure to "what goes on at home for me. That might not be an answer that most would think. We have adult children now, but the sacrifices at home that Tammy made is just ... I could not have done this without that support. There's just no way, whatsoever.

"Her being the primary caretaker and mentor of the children, the leader of our household, without that, there is no way in the world that I would be in this seat for as long as I have been."

Neupauer met Tamatha while both were attending Clarion. They were married in July 1994 and are the parents of Paige Tudor, 26, and Meredith, 23.

His daughters and Paige's husband, Chad, attended BC3 during Neupauer's presidency.

"One reason that Nick's tenure at BC3 is so remarkable is that in my opinion, I have observed him to be absolutely radically committed to that college, its students and its community," Bolden said. "I know for a fact that he would be an appealing candidate for larger institutions in bigger places. But I don't think that appeals to him because of his commitment to Butler County Community College. That is truly what I believe.

"I don't know that the space between where Dr. Neupauer ends and BC3 begins is clearly delineated. I think it is one and the same."

BC3's trustees in June extended Neupauer's contract to June 2025.