

NEW CASTLE NEWS

BC3 soars under county native's leadership

**By Brent Addleman
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Everything Dr. Nick Neupauer has achieved in his career begins and ends with family.

Even as Neupauer enters his 12th year as president of Butler County Community College, he credits the success of his path through adulthood to the lessons he learned by watching his father and uncles.

"What is embedded in me is a very strong work ethic," Neupauer said as he leaned back in his chair, reflecting on the memories of his youth. "What I am doing pales in comparison to what my relatives did on the farms, in the steel mills, and in the coal mines.

"This isn't hard work. What my dad, my grandparents, my uncles did was hard work. That is deeply embedded in my brother and me. These are not easy jobs, the fact that I use that as the benchmark has helped me with success in my career. I am very grateful to those generations before me."

In his 12 years at BC3, the school has grown exponentially, creating additional campuses and receiving more high-level donations. The school also has just earned consecutive No. 1 rankings as the best community college in Pennsylvania, and the school's assets have risen from \$8 million to the \$18-19 million range. It just received its fourth million-dollar gift.

"I have stuck around at a community college, and it is a great time," Neupauer said. "Everything is aligned so much, it is a great time for community colleges, especially BC3.

"We are in Brockway right now. We just had a big announcement. Early in my presidency in 2007, I adopted a regional vision with the blessing of the board of trustees. That regional visiting expanded us to New Castle, Hermitage, Brockway, we are in Ford City, and we have been in Cranberry.

"What is interesting is that by us adopting this regional vision – which was very controversial back home in Butler County – when I first became president, that is one of the many, many reasons why we are excelling as an institution."

OFF TO COLLEGE

Now the longest tenured president in Pennsylvania's higher education system, Neupauer began his journey in 1985 when he graduated from Ellwood City Lincoln High School.

He went on to matriculate at Penn-State Beaver where he earned a degree in print journalism.

Following graduation, he worked for a time as a sports reporter with the Beaver Valley Times and the New Castle News.

But it was at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, where he earned his master of science in communication, that everything changed.

"At Clarion, I met my wife," Neupauer said. "We made a decision that whatever opportunity we got first is the one we would pursue. I applied for SID (sports information director) jobs across the country, and I applied for a doctorate at West Virginia University."

The decision to go into education was made mere minutes before a second opportunity came ringing on Neupauer's phone.

"On a Monday in April at noon, WVU called with a full graduate assistantship, teaching and tuition waiver for a spot in its doctorate program," he said. "Fifteen minutes later is when Northeastern Illinois University offered me an SID job.

"That started me in the path of higher education."

Neupauer knew he wanted to be involved in higher education from his evenings and weekend afternoons spent in gyms at Westminster College, Geneva and Pittsburgh. The college environment sunk its hook in early and deep.

"As a sports reporter, I spent certainly a lot of time covering high school sports, which as you know in this area is king. But, whenever I covered the Westminsters, Genevas and Pitts, there was something about going to a college, or university, event as a reporter, and I really liked that collegiate environment.

"I liked the demographic, I liked the spirit, the camaraderie. I thought I would bridge the gap with both being in that environment but also my sports writing skills for sports information."

Neupauer points to Rich Herman at Clarion University as a big influence on his career. Herman will be inducted into the Lawrence County Hall of Fame later this year.

"He was the SID at Clarion," Neupauer said.

"Herman was the one who ended up hiring me. It was a neat opportunity to take those sports writing skills, get the assistantship. I really had every intention when I went to Clarion to go the sports PR or athletic director side.

"I thought it would be pretty cool to learn how to teach, how to research, and that took me to WVU."

HAVE DEGREE WILL TRAVEL

From 1993-96, Neupauer and his wife, Tammy, found themselves living in Morgantown, West Virginia. He was teaching graduate and undergraduate classes at the school and also held a visiting professor position at nearby Bethany College. Eventually, he moved on to a job at Marist College in Pough-

keepsie, New York.

"At Marist, I was an assistant professor," he said. "In year two or three, I was elected as chair of the communication department, which was unusual because of how young I was. Plus, I was a non-tenured faculty member. I was too naive to know what that meant. But, frankly, what it meant was that as the chair, I was making decisions and evaluating tenured faculty members who in essence would evaluate me to get tenure.

"I didn't realize the politics to it. But, I have always felt that if you do the best that you can and you do the right thing, that stuff will take care of itself."

Not only was Neupauer the department chair, but he started a sports communication program that is still in existence at the school.

COMING HOME

As Neupauer's family had grown with the addition to two daughters, and with his father becoming ill, the family decided it was time to move back to western Pennsylvania.

Neupauer found a job advertisement for a position at Butler County Community College.

"I applied for a dean's position in Butler for 1999," he said.

"Primarily to get close to home, but I wanted to raise my family here. I wanted to be here when my father passed away, and he passed away in 2000. To be here, we promised that my brother and I would help with my mother and we did that."

Neupauer didn't think at the time he accepted the position at BC3 that he would be there more than a decade later.

"I, frankly, thought I would take the dean's position, move back geographically, and then go to a university or liberal arts institution," he said.

"The funny thing is, each year I stayed at the college I really believed in the mission of the institution — that is affordable, quality public education."

WHY A SMALLER INSTITUTION

Neupauer saw the qualities of Butler County Community College in why he chose to accept the position.

"Open access does not mean lesser quality," he said.

"Open access is how I grew up in Ellwood City, how my relatives in New Castle grew up. It is an opportunity at an affordable tuition rate to better yourself through higher education.

"While there were some opportunities at nearby universities that came and went, I threw my hat in and I ended up passing on them. In 2004, I became vice president of academic affairs. In 2007, I became president."

Neupauer was the youngest president at the school and was an internal hire.

He also had an offer for another presidency position within Pennsylvania at the time.

"The board was aware of this and they just appointed me to the position," he said.

"Now, as evidenced by the gray hair and the wrinkles, of 32 public institutions, 14 community colleges, 14 Pennsylvania state system of higher eds, four state-related, I have the longest tenure."

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Neupauer said for a smaller institution, BC3 accepts students of all ages, which has been a key in the school flourishing.

"We are an institution of about 25,000," Neupauer said. "We have about 5,200 credit students annually, and through lifelong learning, public safety, continuing education, workforce development — 20,000 students.

"We don't have all of our eggs in the traditional 18-to-22-year-old basket.

"All these universities and colleges that have built their business model on that – the fact the high school graduation rates are shrinking — there are only so many of those students to go around."

Nontraditional students have been invaluable to BC3.

"BC3 is different in a lot of ways," Neupauer said.

"Our average age is 20. The national average is 28. We certainly have nontraditional students. Seventy percent of our students use BC3 to transfer to a senior institution. Nationally, it is 70 percent who will go to a community college for a degree and go into the workforce.

"We have the highest-percentage of first-generation college students compared to any other public institution in the state. At last count, that was 36 percent.

"Our students work also. When I talk to our students, I meet our students, I teach our students and I harken back to when I grew up at Lincoln High School in Ellwood City, that is how I was."

Neupauer said he is very pleased with the attendance and performance of the school's New Castle campus.

"New Castle has been very good to us," he said.

"I love it because back in the day there used to be a driving range and go karts. I spent a lot of time as a youth here. Now, when I drive up and all of these Lawrence County students, and even some students from Ohio, are taking advantage of this great, quality. That is what we are about."