

Butler Eagle

Opinion: Golf outing big boost to higher education scholarships

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Pennsylvania has been ranked as one of the states with the most student debt, and the cost of attending college in the Keystone State is slightly higher than the national average.

So, it's great to hear an annual event held by Butler County Community College's Education Foundation raised more than \$1 million in the past 23 years to go toward scholarships and other initiatives.

A total of 113 players and 60 sponsors took part in BC3's golf outing Aug. 2, raising a whopping \$95,000 in a single day and pushing the total amount of money generated through the event since 1996 past the \$1 million mark.

Money from the event goes toward everything from travel expenses for students participating in sports or honorary societies to paying a faculty member to manage BC3's art gallery and an initiative relating to the opioid epidemic known as Hope is Dope.

But the great news for Butler County students intending to advance their education after high school is the outing provides money for BC3's President's Scholarship.

Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation, said the scholarship can be obtained by the top 10 percent of students in Butler County public high schools.

Each year, about 25 county students qualify for the scholarship, which pays full tuition, aside from fees for books and other items. The scholarship is renewable after a student's first year.

While endowed money to the college has a specific donor-related purpose, unrestricted funds from the golf outing can go toward an initiative of the college's choice.

So, it's great scholarships are among the designated areas to fund.

College Board, a nonprofit organization aiming to expand access to higher education, found in a 2017-18 study that the average cost of attending college at the undergraduate level in the United States — including tuition, fees, books, supplies and room and board — was \$34,740 at private colleges and \$9,970 for state residents at public colleges.

But in Pennsylvania, the average tuition in 2019 for in-state colleges is \$11,416, but rises to \$28,150 when supplies and room and board are included.

Students attending BC3 full time already are ahead of that debt curve thanks to the college's commitment to keep tuition rates not only reasonable, but affordable. Butler County residents pay about \$3,540 annually for full-time enrollment and Pennsylvania residents pay about \$6,540.

Earlier this summer, Pennsylvania was ranked in studies by financial advice and credit report provider WalletHub and Peterson's College Data among the states with the highest amounts of student debt.

Last year, a report by the Keystone Research Center, a public policy organization, ranked Pennsylvania 47th among states for per capita funding for higher education.

In other words, there are financial challenges for students in Butler County who seek higher education but can't afford it.

So, BC3 — and those who helped to make this year's golf outing a success — should be commended.

The community college made the right choice by prioritizing scholarships when allocating money raised during the event.

Expanding education opportunities for students in the community is a smart way to invest in Butler County.

— **Nathan C. Duke, Butler Eagle city editor**