

Ellwood City Ledger

Ellwood City native Nick Neupauer, president of Butler County Community College, earns top honor from Phi Theta Kappa

By Staff reports

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BUTLER — A notable Ellwood City native has been honored with an international award.

The Phi Theta Kappa academic honor society has chosen Nick Neupauer, president of Butler County Community College, to receive its highest honor, the Shirley B. Gordon Award of Distinction, at its April 20 centennial celebration in Kansas City.

Phi Theta Kappa has 3.2 million members in 10 countries. The society's Rho Phi chapter at BC3 reached elite five-star status last year, and in 2016 produced BC3's first Pennsylvania New Century Scholar in Maizee Zaccone of Butler.

"Dr. Neupauer is one of the most supportive college presidents that I know," said Pattie Van Atter, coordinator of a Middle States Region that includes Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., and to which Rho Phi belongs.

His candidacy for the award — named in honor of Phi Theta Kappa's longest-serving board chair and longtime president of Highline Community College in Des Moines, Wash. — began with Rho Phi's nomination, "which," Van Atter said, "was judged on the international level."

Neupauer's dedication to Phi Theta Kappa is evident in his collaboration with Rho Phi, which "wasn't anything that I expected from a college president," said Chris Slay, 36, a resident of Butler, the president of BC3's chapter and a social work major. "You might tend to think of college presidents as being unapproachable. And he is about as approachable as you can get."

The award that lauds the successful and productive relationship between a college president and the academic honor society represents the realization of a goal born in 2008, when Neupauer and Rho Phi officers attended Phi Theta Kappa's national conference in Philadelphia and witnessed the citation being conferred.

"I recall thinking that it would be wonderful if the college would receive such recognition," said Neupauer, whose 11-year presidency at a single institution exceeds that of any current leader among Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges, its 14 State System of Higher Education institutions and its four state-related schools — Lincoln, Penn State and Temple universities and the University of Pittsburgh.

"At that point I understood how closely linked an excellent Phi Theta Kappa chapter is with the vision and working relationship with the respective college president," he said. "It was something that always stuck with me, not about getting the award as much as it was about working closely with the Rho Phi chapter."

Rho Phi's nomination also cited Neupauer's engagement in a Western Leadership Conference held for Phi Theta Kappa's Middle States Region; and by providing financial support for Rho Phi's officers to attend a regional conference in Long Branch, N.J., and a national conference in Washington, D.C.

Phi Theta Kappa

Phi Theta Kappa — with 1,300 chapters in American Samoa, Canada, the Federated States of Micronesia, Germany, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the United Arab Emirates and the United States — has headquarters in Jackson, Miss. Its members must have at least a 3.5 grade-point average.