

\$2.3M Wise children's center at BC3 on track for January opening



Roger Muto, of Fenelton, a bricklayer with Etzel Masonry, Butler, lays stone inside the Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center on the main campus of Butler County Community College on Friday, Sept. 15, 2017.

Administrator: 21st-century building to replicate school's rustic appeal

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(Butler, PA) Short bursts of screw guns affixing drywall, of power saws slicing wood, of electric drills boring holes for piping, all originating down the hall and through locked doors, serenade her 21 preschoolers to sleep in mid-afternoon, and compose the soundtrack of Judy Zuzack's dream coming true.

What is today a work zone of scissor lifts, cement mixers and small tractors with rotating brooms, is on track to open on schedule in January as the \$2.3 million Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township.

Zuzack, director of the Children's Creative Learning Center since 2003, said she, her staff of four and her preschoolers are "getting very excited" – particularly as they watch the day-to-day evolution of the building since its groundbreaking in June.

Funded in part by a \$1 million gift from John L. Wise III and family, the Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center will represent a permanent location for 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in the state-licensed preschool and childcare center.

The Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center will be more than twice as large as its most recent predecessor, BC3's original bookstore, the use of which was enlisted after a 60-foot oak tree fell on the children's center's longtime home, Armstrong Lodge, during off-hours in May 2010.



“The Wise family has supported education in our community”

“It is fun to be able to watch it as it progresses right outside here,” Zuzack said from her office across the hall from the two classrooms within BC3's Arts & Hospitality building that have been temporarily repurposed to accommodate her preschoolers during construction.

Ed Malloy, of Raccoon Township, Beaver County, a steamfitter with Reno Brothers, New Brighton, brazes copper tubing to connect boilers to a heating line within the Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center on the main campus of Butler County Community College on Friday, Sept. 15, 2017.

Amy Wise, a teacher and sister of John L. Wise III, passed away in November 2014 in Willison, Vt.

The gift from John L. Wise III and family in September 2016 was the second \$1 million donation to the BC3 Education Foundation in its history and second in a span of 26 months. It followed a \$1 million gift from Robert R. Heaton, whose July 2014 donation was used to fund what became BC3's \$5 million Heaton Family Learning Commons, which opened in August 2016.

“Every time I walk past the Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center being built on campus, I am touched time and again by the generosity of the Wise family to BC3,” said Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation. “From the genesis of the idea of

starting a community college in Butler to the soon-to-be-opened new center for the youngest of our students on the main campus, the Wise family has supported education in our community.

“In fact, when John Wise III and I were walking past the now demolished childcare center, we noticed a plaque listing the original trustees of BC3. On the plaque was his father’s name – John Wise Jr. Now that plaque will be placed in front of a childcare center honoring his daughter. That reflects a family that has quietly made a difference for generations in Butler.”

John Wise Jr. served as a BC3 trustee from 1965-66 through 1968-69.



Work continues inside the 6,500-square-foot Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center on the main campus of Butler County Community College on Friday, Sept. 15, 2017.

Natural light to bathe expanded space

Operating from the original BC3 bookstore, the 2,500-square-foot Children’s Creative Learning Center – flanked by BC3’s Arts & Hospitality and Social Sciences buildings – had been confined to one large classroom and one small classroom that also doubled as the children’s lunch area. It included a small office, small kitchen area and bathrooms.

The “highly secured” 6,500-square-foot Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center – to be bathed in natural light from a bank of windows near an 18-foot-high, light-colored ceiling – will also connect the Arts & Hospitality and Social Sciences buildings, said Brian R. Opitz, BC3’s executive director of operations.

A storage area, kitchen, restrooms and multi-purpose room will be positioned on the south side of the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center, according to Opitz.

A large classroom space will be located in the center, as well as an observation room, from which parents and BC3 child development and early childhood education students can study the children’s interactions with one another without entering the preschool space, Zuzack said.

“That will be a benefit for the (BC3) students and for the parents if the parents want to see how their child is adjusting to the classroom environment without the child knowing that they are watching them,” Zuzack said. “Children will act completely different when they know their parents are watching them than they will when they are just in the classroom with us.”

One of her own dreams when creating the early childhood education program, said Judith M. Wadding, a BC3 professor of Humanities and Social Sciences, “was to have a lab school. We needed to have a preschool where our students would go to observe the processes that we were teaching and advocating in the early childhood program.”



The exterior of the 6,500-square-foot Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center on the main campus of Butler County Community College is shown Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2017.

With the Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center, Wadding said, “our students can go and view the children without interrupting what they are doing, observing children in a natural setting.”

An office, conference room, staff work room and second set of restrooms will be located on the north side of the facility, according to Opitz.

Center to replicate “state-park type atmosphere”

The expanded floor space will eliminate her staff having to move children's tables, chairs, sand and water tables, and shelving units – “whatever was in the middle of the room” – to the periphery to create play or work space for children during inclement weather, as had been the case at the original BC3 bookstore, Zuzack said.

“That will be such a change in our day, because it is not as stressful, not as hectic,” Zuzack said, adding that children's wooden building block structures and artwork in progress can remain for days within the complex and not have to be removed or moved to create play or work space.

While Zuzack's children napped in a room through the locked doors and down the hall, steamfitter Ed Malloy, of Reno Brothers, New Brighton, was soldering copper tubing to connect boilers to a heating line within the Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center. Bricklayers Roger Muto and Richard Saeler, of Etzel Masonry, Butler, were puzzling together various shapes and sizes of exposed stone to a half-wall near the entry.

The stone accent is among the many natural features complementing a building designed by DPH Architecture, of Canfield, Ohio, and replicates the rustic appeal of most structures on campus, Opitz said.

“Some people have described it as a state-park type atmosphere,” Opitz said, “with the trees and the rough-hewn cedar on our facilities, and the stone. We have carried that stone element through into the new buildings. We're tying in to 1964 buildings, the original buildings on campus, and

keeping that feel in the 21st century. So many students come here and say they like the atmosphere of the campus. We don't want to sway too much from that."

"A dream of mine for a long time"

The Children's Creative Learning Center, which as a Keystone STAR 4 facility has earned the highest licensing rating given by the state Departments of Education and of Human Services, enrolls children of BC3 students, employees and community members.

From her office down the hall and through locked doors, Zuzack is anticipating the possibilities associated with bringing nature inside, with soothing earth-tone paint colors, whimsical sliding barn doors, varieties of potted plants.

"I am just excited because it's been a dream of mine for a long time to have a state-of-the-art center for children," Zuzack said, her eyes welling with tears. "This is a job that I am very, very passionate about and it's been a large part of my life. I am just thrilled."