

# Former carpenter among distinguished alumni who build BC3 legacies

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(Butler, PA) Eugene and Alice Boozel's youngest child is in this moment - behind the lectern, under the Butler County Community College crest and in the spotlight, dabbing wet eyes with a clump of tissue - precisely because he was told he couldn't be.

Kevin Boozel could build houses, yes, and Kevin Boozel could work on a farm, his high school adviser said in 1989. But he couldn't attend college, she reasoned, because Boozel chose to pursue a carpentry program at Butler Area Vocational Technical School instead of an academic curriculum.

"She said, 'No, you really can't do that,'" Boozel recalls.

Why not? he asked.

"Because you didn't prepare," the adviser countered.

He sought out his carpentry instructor, James Nicodemus.

"I told him he had an opportunity and I didn't want him to miss out," Nicodemus says.

A week later, Kevin Boozel returned to that adviser, announced he was rejecting her advice "and walked out of her office."

At BC3's Oak Hills Dinner, Boozel walked across the stage inside Founders Hall, following relatives of the late Debra Lee Covert McGrath and the late Rae McGrath, in being honored as one of three distinguished BC3 alumni.

In the years between, the 45-year-old Boozel tells the crowd of 350, in a matter-of-fact tone, about earning an associate degree in elementary education from BC3, a bachelor's degree from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and a master's degree from Geneva College.

But it was those two \$500 scholarships he received at BC3, he says, looking back and through tear-filled eyes, his voice breaking with emotion - that "made the difference for me."

Like Debra or Debbie McGrath - "never 'Deb,'" her daughter, Lauren, cautions - and Lauren's grandmother, Rae McGrath, Boozel has made a difference himself.

The first-term Butler County Commissioner volunteers to assist disadvantaged children in Butler, as a firefighter and emergency medical technician in Harrisville, and with a Harmony unit that counsels first-responders after crises. That altruism continued on Saturday night, when he

announced his creation of the Boozel Scholarship for first-generation college students and in honor of his father, an unemployed home insulation manufacturer when his youngest child stated he wanted to become his first to pursue a post-secondary education.

Eugene Boozel died in May at age 68.

“My dad had always given me one piece of advice, and I’ve lived it, and I truly believe it,” Boozel said. “He said, ‘Son’ - Boozel reaches for the tissue box on the lectern - ‘I gave you one thing in this world and I expect you to do everything you can to protect it, with everything you have, and that’s your last name.’”

“I think we’ve all done very well with our name.”

His son, Zach, 19, is in the Air Force, and son Colton, 17, has enlisted in the Army.

“In my father’s honor,” Boozel continues, “my wife and I and my family, are announcing a scholarship in honor of my dad, Eugene Boozel. And it will be a forever scholarship here at BC3. And I can’t be more proud of that.”

He became the second BC3 scholarship recipient to create his own such financial gift. Boozel follows Tanner McCaw, a 2013 graduate and 24-year-old who this spring founded the McCaw Family Scholarship.

Lauren McGrath is equally proud of her mother, Debra Lee Covert McGrath, and her grandmother, Rae McGrath.

Debra, who died at age 58 in May 2014 in North Bethesda, Md., was a 1976 graduate of BC3. She would later graduate with the highest honors from the University of Pittsburgh, where she earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees. During a career that began as BC3’s first director of the ACT 101 Equal Opportunity Program, Debra demonstrated a deep commitment to educational opportunities for disadvantaged students.

She married Matt McGrath in 1982 and moved to Washington, D.C., where she established DCM Management, a consulting business showcasing her expertise in organizational management.

“Having benefited from her unending enthusiasm and support from her first-hand, I am thrilled to know that other students have benefited from her work, and the foundation she created for the ACT 101 program,” Lauren says. “To say I miss her guidance, wisdom and love would be the understatement of the century.”

From the day her mother was born until the day she died, Lauren says, “She lived life with a book in her hand and a thirst for knowledge that never abated.”

As did Rae McGrath, who taught math and English as an original member of BC3’s faculty in 1966.

“This is the community she sought when she took the job in 1966,” said Matt McGrath, Lauren’s father and Rae’s son. “A community of friends that my brother and father embraced and a community that, frankly, my wife never left.”

Rae became chairperson of Humanities in 1971, a full professor in 1978 and was voted Outstanding Faculty Member in 1983. She created the Tuesday College program to enable homemakers returning to the work force to attend college once a week to earn an associate degree. She served for 11 years as registrar until her retirement in 1995.

She earned a bachelor’s degree in biology and chemistry from Allegheny College, and a master’s degree in English from the University of Iowa. She was also an instructor at Duquesne University. She wrote the lyrics of the college’s alma mater, “Hail to Thee, Oh Butler College.”

Rae, an active member of Soroptimist International, an organization known for its fundraising activities on behalf of education and career advancement for women, died in March 2008 at age 82.

Dr. Nicholas Neupauer, BC3 President, after leading the applause acknowledging Boozel’s contributions, asked Matt and Lauren McGrath back to the lectern.

“You’ve done a phenomenal job,” he said to Lauren, 28, who earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at Johns Hopkins University and a Master of Science degree from the London School of Economics and is within a week of beginning a position with Pew Charitable Trusts.

“I know your dad is very proud of you, your grandmother is very proud of you, and your mother is very proud of you,” Neupauer said. “You have a wonderful career and life ahead of you.”

As a token of BC3’s appreciation, Neupauer said, Debbie McGrath and Rae McGrath will each be honored by having an alumni legacy scholarship named in their honor beginning in 2017-18.

That’s about the same time the Boozel Scholarship will begin, compliments of the former carpentry student who returned to the Butler Area School District, where as a student teacher he greeted the adviser who said he could never attend college.

“What a day!” he says.

And for BC3, what a night.

*Photo Caption: Kevin Boozel, left, a 1991 graduate of Butler County Community College, is shown with James Nicodemus, his former carpentry teacher at the Butler Area Vocational Technical School during the Oak Hills Dinner at BC3 on Saturday, Oct. 15, 2016. Nicodemus encouraged his former carpentry student to attend college. BC3 honored Boozel, along with the late Debra Lee Covert McGrath and the late Rae McGrath, as distinguished alumni.*