

Mom makes good on pact with self, receives 1 of BC3's 126 scholarships

College announces 2019-2020 recipients

Nov. 13, 2019



Noralynn Mayer, 48, of Valencia, is shown Friday, Oct. 11, 2019, outside of Butler Memorial Hospital, where the Butler County Community College Nursing, R.N., student is taking her clinical studies. Mayer is the first recipient of the Karen M. McCurdy Nursing Scholarship, one of 126 named scholarships to be awarded to BC3 students in the 2019-2020 academic year by the BC3 Education Foundation.

(Butler, PA) Noralynn Mayer's critically ill newborn son coded while being rushed to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia with kidney and lung infections.

"He had stopped breathing," Mayer said.

All the 34-year-old mother could do was to comfort Declan, her 10-hour-old, 7-pound, 8-ounce infant, his name chosen "impulsively" when Noralynn and her husband, Robert, were told to name the baby before meeting with a summoned priest.

“We thought he was going to be baptized,” Noralynn said.

Declan, so named in an honor to an Irish great-grandmother who loved the name, received instead from the priest last rites.

And from physicians, a ventilator.

“It was terrifying,” Mayer said. “I realized seeing him there that it meant the world to me to have someone to take care of my child when I couldn’t. I didn’t have the skills.”

While she and Robert feared their second son would die, Mayer made a deal with herself.

“No matter what happens, when Declan is stable, I will go back to school and become a nurse,” Mayer said. “And I’ll give someone else that same feeling to let them know that their loved one is being cared for.”



Noralynn Mayer is shown with her newborn son Declan at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia in this undated family photo. Mayer decided to pursue a career in nursing after Declan was born critically ill. She expects to graduate from Butler County Community College with an associate degree in Nursing, R.N., in May.

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Former Army Spc. 5 Gary McCurdy, 23, and three fellow military veterans attending Butler County Community College were playing cards inside BC3’s Student Union when his pinochle partner had to leave and pushed himself away from a table.

Karen Bowser, whom McCurdy had never met, and other students had been watching the game McCurdy learned to play while stationed in Germany.

“Karen came over,” according to McCurdy, “and said, ‘I’ll play.’”

“I said, ‘You know how to play pinochle?’”

“She said, ‘Yeah.’”



Gary and Karen McCurdy are shown in this undated family photo. They met at Butler County Community College in 1971 and were married within a year. Gary, Karen and their two children earned associate degrees at BC3. Karen passed away Dec. 15.

The 18-year-old became McCurdy’s pinochle partner that day on BC3’s main campus in fall 1971, when they would fall for each other.

Married within a year.

Parents to daughter Heather and son Scott within four.

Gary and Karen, of Butler and Butler Area Senior High School graduates, would suspend their education at BC3 while starting their family, with Gary returning to earn an associate degree in computer science in 1978, and Karen in nursing in 1985.

Karen Bowser – daughter to a chronically ill father and who would become a wife, mother and household manager while Gary returned to the Army and as a sergeant major to its out-of-state and overseas trainings – was diagnosed with Stage 3 lung cancer in January 2017.

She and Gary continued to play pinochle – online, as a team against “robots,” Gary said – and for the last time Dec. 8, 2018.

Karen, who was about to enter hospice after 18 rounds of chemotherapy and four hospitalizations in an intensive care unit with recurring pneumonitis, told Gary on Dec. 14, “Well, I was trying to hang on until Christmas.”

She would pass away the next day, at 65, ending a 47-year romance that began at BC3, but beginning a legacy that would help others who attend their alma mater.

Others like Noralynn Mayer, a student in BC3’s Nursing, R.N., program, who made good on that deal she made with herself while standing helplessly over Declan’s bedside in 2004.



Declan Mayer was born with bilateral hydronephrosis, which is kidney swelling; and septicemia, blood poisoning; developed pneumonia and spent two weeks in the neonatal intensive care unit at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

“And then,” Mayer said, “he got better.”

Mayer had to give her son antibiotics for his first year.

By the time Declan was 5, Mayer had earned a practical nurse license from Burlington County Institute of Technology in Burlington, N.J.

By his seventh birthday, in 2011, Mayer and her family returned to her native Butler County, and to Valencia, where she talked with a cousin employed as a nurse at a Pittsburgh hospital about continuing her education and pursuing an associate degree in registered nursing.

“She said, ‘Go to BC3.’

“She said of all the students they have come in, ‘BC3 students are the best prepared and have the best reputation.’”

Noralynn Mayer – wife, mother, licensed practical nurse, and former fast-food worker, travel agent, airline reservation agent and loan processor with a “vast collection of nametags” – took her cousin Janine Terry’s advice and enrolled at BC3.



Noralynn Mayer, center, of Valencia, is shown Oct. 12, 2019, at Butler County Community College’s Oak Hills Dinner, which introduces scholarship recipients such as herself to donors. From left, Scott McCurdy; Gary McCurdy; Mayer; Mayer’s husband, Robert; and Heather McCurdy Goehring. BC3 graduates Gary McCurdy and his children Scott and Heather created a scholarship in honor of Gary’s wife and the children’s mother, Karen, a 1985 BC3 graduate who passed away Dec. 15. Mayer is the first recipient of the Karen M. McCurdy Nursing Scholarship.

In 2019 she became the first recipient of the Karen M. McCurdy Nursing Scholarship, established by Gary McCurdy, and children Heather and Scott – who like their parents are BC3 graduates, Heather in 2013 and Scott in 1999.

The funding “helps so much,” said Mayer, 48, who works three days a week for a home health company in Wexford and attends BC3 classes four days a week.

“That money means that when there is a test, I can take Monday off from work,” Mayer said, “and study.”

Those study habits resulted in her achieving the highest score on the spring Health Education Systems Inc. exam, that with an applicant being enrolled in BC3’s Nursing, R.N., program is required for eligibility to receive funds earned from the \$15,000 McCurdy endowment.

Students in BC3’s Nursing, R.N., program take the Health Education Systems Inc. exam each semester to measure their academic progress and to prepare for the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses – known as the state boards.

Karen McCurdy herself earned a perfect score on her state boards, McCurdy said.

Mayer expects to graduate from BC3 with the skills she lacked when Declan was critically ill, and capable of giving someone else “that same feeling to let them know that their loved one is being cared for.”

Mayer's husband of 26 years will watch Noralynn receive her associate of applied science degree in Nursing, R.N., from BC3 on May 13, as will eldest son, Riley – and Declan, today a 6-foot-3, 190-pound traveling soccer player, Mars Area High sophomore and at 15 still the inspiration for his mother's achievement.

"It's very special to me," Declan said. "It means a lot."



The Karen M. McCurdy Nursing Scholarship is among 10 new awards available from the BC3 Education Foundation and awarded for the first time in the 2019-2020 academic year, joining those created by Budget Blinds of Butler, the Butler County American Legion Post 117, the Butler County American Legion Post 778, Mary Cranmer Huff, Michelle Edinger Jamieson, Thomas and Venita O'Brien, Donald L. Rose, Thomas M. Ward and Nancy Ann Zirnsak.

McCurdy, of Erie, met the woman who received the first Karen M. McCurdy Nursing Scholarship in October, in Founders Hall during BC3's Oak Hills Dinner, which introduces scholarship donors to their recipients. The McCurdys and Mayers sat one floor above where McCurdy met Karen Bowser that day on BC3's main campus in fall 1971.

"What kind of struck us," Gary said, including Heather and Scott, "is how similar Noralynn's story is with Karen's story because Karen had kids at home when she went back to school, and Noralynn is juggling school, and family and work. It seems like they kind of paralleled each other."

Said Mayer: "I will keep Karen in mind every time I take care of someone. It's not just about what I am doing anymore. It's about her too."

Mayer is among students from Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Clarion, Clearfield, Elk, Indiana, Jefferson, Lawrence and Mercer counties who have received one of the 126 named scholarships totaling \$217,000 and awarded by the BC3 Education Foundation in the 2019-2020 academic year.

"As I look back on scholarships, inevitably, people come to us," said Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation. "They have been touched emotionally by one of our students. They have some sort of connection. We have a gentleman who recently created a scholarship whose wife was being cared for at a rehab facility by some of the nurses who came through BC3. After his wife passed, he created a scholarship, and the facility where she was being treated is matching that."



Declan Mayer, who as a critically ill infant coded as he was being rushed to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, is shown in this undated family photo. Declan today is 15, and is a 6-foot-3, 190-pound traveling soccer player and Mars Area High sophomore.

The majority of BC3 donors who establish a scholarship do so to memorialize or honor someone, said Michelle Jamieson, associate director of the BC3 Education Foundation.

“There’s always a story behind a scholarship,” Jamieson said. “It’s rarely just a transaction. The McCurdys have a BC3 story. Karen and Gary met at BC3. Their children both graduated from BC3. And that is what we have seen a lot now, generations of students coming to BC3. And the McCurdys are a BC3 family.”

BC3’s tuition is among the most affordable of 43 regional colleges and universities, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s 2018 College Scorecard. Seventy percent of BC3 graduates are debt-free.

Other recipients of 2019-2020 scholarships from the BC3 Education Foundation are:

Allegheny County

Gibsonia: John Baldauff, Michael Rothrauff.

Armstrong County

Cowansville: Emily Maurer.

Kittanning: Jonathan Brake and Elizabeth Rettig-Seitam.

Numine: Brianna Jordan.

Butler County

Butler: Eric Arnette, Melissa Bacheler, Jeremiah Bellis, Abigail Black, Carrissa Blystone, Annamarie Buzard, Amy Christensen, Trent Donaldson, Chalee Durand, Kierra Elder, Davanna Feyrer, Noah Flatt, Logan Francis, Kathryn Hartzell, Michelle Hilke, Ashley Jordan, Breanna Kameron, Kyria Karenbauer, Jesse Kearse, Alyssa Mainhart, John Maze, Logan McKissick, Codi Misera, Olivia Montag, Savannah Neyman, Logan Parker, Josephine Reott, Rachael Robinson, Barbara Rugh, Lillian Schoettker, Vincent Slomers, Madison Stivenson, John Tuka, Savana Turner, Jay Van Cise, Abbey Walker, Chelsea Walker, Sarah Weber, Madelyn Welsh, Benjamin Witham, Zachary Zawrotuk and Ayleen Zepeda.

Cabot: Rachel Boltz, Louise Brumbaugh, Libby Casey, Emma Freyermuth, Abigail Horn, Teresa Kuo, Abigail Markle and Autumn Trempus.

Chicora: Grace Bard, Lani Fetterman, Kyleigh Fleege, Kaitlyn Fleege, Madden McMillen, Joshua Riesmeyer, Dalton Stenzel and Alyssa Weibel.

Cranberry Township: Jazeel Abdallah, Madhuri Govindu, Dennis Grassl and Ashley Peters.

East Butler: Candice Hawkins and Dylan Hesidenz.



Karen McCurdy is shown in this undated family photo. After Karen’s passing in December, her family created the Karen M. McCurdy Nursing Scholarship, which was awarded for the first time by the BC3 Education Foundation this year. Karen, of Erie, was a former Butler resident and a graduate of Butler County Community College.

Eau Claire: Justin Altman.
Evans City: Bryanna Gallant, Abigail Kondos and Joshua Smith.
Fenelton: Deni Mealey.
Harmony: Abigail Kingerski.
Hilliards: Megan Mentel.
Lyndora: Alek Howell.
Karns City: Amelia Brown and Morgan Vlassich.
Mars: Ryan Swann and Anthony Washington.
Petrolia: Joshua Morrow and Makayla Rieder.
Portersville: Olivia Girdwood.
Renfrew: Taylor Gilliland.
Sarver: Abigail Bastaja, Michaela Buday, Gracie Cornetti, Jesse Fesel, Madison Koegler, Gregory Miller and Ryan Shaffer.
Saxonburg: Taylor Dzikowski and Alexander Edder.
Slippery Rock: Charlee Caldwell, Shyan Grossman, Laura Gutasukas, Michelle Isacco and Madeline Webb.
Valencia: Noralynn Mayer and Kevin Meneou.
West Sunbury: Ellie Beach and Leanna Jewart.
Zelienople: Molly Gill.

Clarion County

Falls Creek: Alaina Horm.

Clearfield County

Parker: Makala Bailey.

Elk County

Brockport: Michele Hatten.
Weedville: Jaycie Filer.

Indiana County

Homer City: Jennifer Pompelia.

Jefferson County

Brockway: Lauren Hidinger.
Brookville: Ethan Davie and Julianne Forsythe.
Corsica: Beth Smouse.
Reynoldsville: Mark Badtorff.

Lawrence County

Edinburg: Danielle Clark.
Ellwood City: Chloe Fox.
New Castle: Erin Dawson, Joanna Ingram, Samantha Joki, Jennifer Leasha, Sarah McCowin, Tucker Shevitz and Ryan Veinotte.
Volant: Dominic Gargiulo.
Wampum: Jade Woloszyn.

Mercer County

Farrell: Jazmin Lopez.

Greenville: Laura Weiss.

Grove City: Eric Little and Ellaura Shoop.

Jamestown: Clare Redick.