

# Motorcyclists donate another \$10K for BC3 student-veterans

Aug. 5, 2021



Butler County Community College student-veterans Marshana Harris, left, of Kittanning, and Chelsea Walter, right, of Mars, are shown with Denny Christie, president of the Butler American Legion Riders from Post 117, on BC3's main campus in Butler Township on Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. The motorcycle group has donated another \$10,000 to the BC3 Education Foundation to support BC3 student-veterans.

(Butler, PA) A motorcycle group from an American Legion post in Butler County has contributed another \$10,000 to its Butler County Community College scholarship fund, one that without another penny since its endowment in 2018 would have continued to support student-veterans pursuing higher education as they transition to civilian life.

The Butler American Legion Riders from Post 117 established the Butler American Legion Riders Veterans Incentive Scholarship Post 117 with the BC3 Education Foundation in 2015. The scholarship reached a \$10,000 endowment level in 2018. The social and fund-raising group based in Butler contributed another \$10,000 in July.

Among requirements for Riders' 80 members are that they drive a motorcycle powered by at least a 350-cubic-inch engine.

Funds for the Riders' second gift to the BC3 Education Foundation were raised through raffles, registration fees for annual rides and contributions from members since 2015, said Denny Christie, the Riders' president and a former military police officer in the Army in the 1970s.

## “It really is a military-friendly school”

BC3 is the only institution of higher education to which the Riders contribute financial gifts, Denny said, and is one that has been honored six times as a Military Friendly School, most recently in March.

“That definitely reinforces that we made the right decision that BC3 is out there willing to help our veterans as well,” Christie said. “It makes you feel very good.”

Added Chelsea Walker: “It really is a military-friendly school.”

Walker in 2020-2021 was the ninth BC3 student-veteran to receive the \$500 award and Marshana Harris this fall will be the 10th, according to Lynn Ismail, interim assistant director of the BC3 Education Foundation and its financial manager.

Walker and Harris are among the 55 veterans and active-duty military enrolled this fall at BC3's main campus or at BC3 @ Cranberry in Butler County, at BC3 @ Armstrong in Armstrong County, at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in Lawrence County or at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Mercer County, according to Stella Smith, BC3's veterans coordinator and the college's associate director of financial aid.

Each branch of the military is represented by BC3 student-veterans or active-duty military. BC3's eldest student-veteran is 58; the youngest, an 18-year-old who serves in the Pennsylvania National Guard, Smith said.



Patches and pins are shown on the front of a leather vest worn by Denny Christie, president of the Butler American Legion Riders from Post 117 and a former military police officer in the Army in the 1970s, on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township on Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. The motorcycle group has donated another \$10,000 to the BC3 Education Foundation to support BC3 student-veterans.



## “They want to pay it forward”

The Riders’ scholarship supports student-veterans or active-duty military as they pursue higher education in their transition to civilian life, said Smith, whose father served in the Army in the Korean War.

“It helps,” Smith said, “because when they are discharged from the military, a lot of the veterans do not have jobs. And they have other expenses. So this helps them. Being fellow veterans, the (Riders) know that. They want to pay it forward.”

Nearly 45 percent of BC3’s student-veterans or active-duty military are enrolled full-time and nearly 45 percent are females. Among them, Air Force veterans Walker, 28, and Harris, 35.

Each plans to graduate in May. Walker, of Mars, is pursuing a career program in Nursing, R.N., and Harris, of Kittanning, a transfer program in general studies.

Walker is also a senior airman with the Pennsylvania Air National Guard based in Pittsburgh. Harris, the third of four siblings to serve in the military, plans to become the first member of her immediate family to graduate from college.

The Butler American Legion Riders Veterans Incentive Scholarship Post 117 “helped me to pay for my books. Tremendously,” Walker said. For Harris, it will help “to cover my school supplies.”

Walker’s ultimate goal is to become a midwife. Harris said she intends to explore options that will allow her to be creative and of service to others.

“I’ve had a few friends who went to BC3 and they all thought very highly of it,” said Walker, a medical technician in the Air Force and Pennsylvania Air National Guard. “I knew I didn’t want to go to a big state university. I talked to a lot of my nurses for guidance. They recommended that I attend a community college at first.



An American Legion Riders patch is shown on the back of a leather vest worn by Denny Christie, president of the Butler American Legion Riders from Post 117 and a former military police officer in the Army in the 1970s, on Butler County Community College’s main campus in Butler Township on Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. The motorcycle group has donated another \$10,000 to the BC3 Education Foundation to support BC3 student-veterans.

“They said when you go to a big state university, it’s harder to get one-on-one time. They said you learn more from community colleges and it’s more personalized. And they are absolutely right.”

## “BC3 likes to work with veterans”

Viqtory in 2021 named BC3 as a Military Friendly School for the sixth time since 2013. The service-disabled, veteran-owned small business in Moon Township that assesses educational institutions nationwide also named BC3 in 2021 as a Military Friendly Spouse School.

Viqtory evaluates academic policies and compliance, admissions and orientation, culture and commitment, financial aid and assistance, graduation and career outcomes, and military student support and retention. BC3 in March exceeded benchmark standards in all six categories.

Prior to her enrollment, Walker said she had heard “only positive things” about BC3 from other veterans.

“They said that BC3 is a really good school,” Walker said. “BC3 likes to work with veterans and it has other services.”

BC3 offers priority registration to student-veterans, enabling them to reserve seats in courses two weeks in advance of other students. The college schedules former BC3 student-veterans to guide orientations for new BC3 student-veterans, reserves a study room for student-veterans during finals week and provides a lounge specifically for student-veterans.

“Student-veterans are likelier to be older and married with different life experiences than traditional students,” Smith said. “The veterans lounge is somewhere to go with people with very similar experiences. At least they understand where they came from and what they’ve done. ... Just being in the same room can be really nice.”

BC3 in 2016 created the Green Zone.

The Green Zone, comprised of 24 administrators and faculty members who have received specialized training, educates other faculty and staff about the military experience, challenges student-veterans attending BC3 face when transitioning from military service to civilian life and to college, and resources and basic resource referral techniques.

Criteria for the Butler American Legion Riders Veterans Incentive Scholarship Post 117 include having been honorably discharged from military service and a minimum grade-point average of 2.0.

The Butler American Legion Riders Veterans Incentive Scholarship Post 117 is one of six available to BC3 student-veterans from the BC3 Education Foundation. Others are the Butler County American Legion Post 778 Scholarship, the Butler County American Legion Post 117 Scholarship, the Butler County American Legion Auxiliary Post 117 Scholarship, the Spc. Ross

A. McGinnis “Pay a Good Deed Forward” Scholarship and the Butler French and Belgian Club Scholarship.

The college’s noncredit Lifelong Learning division this fall will offer again a free, three-hour course named Veteran Suicide: Suicide Prevention is Everyone’s Business as a face-to-face class Oct. 13 on BC3’s main campus and as an online class Oct. 20. For more information, visit [bc3.edu/lifelong-learning](http://bc3.edu/lifelong-learning).