

Butler Eagle

Gift to BC3 a reminder about community pride, giving back

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— J.L.W.III

When talking about his \$1 million donation to Butler County Community College at a ceremony Tuesday, Robert Heaton offered a few thoughts worth remembering, about hard work, community pride and giving back.

More than anything, Heaton's gift to the community college is an example of generosity and of giving back. Although Heaton received a degree in mortuary science from Case Western Reserve, he spent most of his working life as a real estate developer. Heaton, 85, spoke with pride of his 70-plus years of working, including a stint during high school assembling Bantam trailers for Jeeps. His real estate business, RHGL Inc., has kept him active since the 1950s.

Speaking at a ceremony held at the college's John A. Beck Jr. library, Heaton said that his out-of-town guests have always been given a tour of the BC3 campus as well as Lake Authur. Explaining the highlights of his tour, Heaton noted that the college and the lake at Moraine State Park are two Butler assets he is most proud of. His generous gift is a tangible expression of his appreciation of what the college has meant to the county.

At Tuesday's ceremony, Heaton candidly admitted that he questioned efforts to create the college in the mid-1960s. But since then, he's come to appreciate the BC3 education, particularly in technical fields, as well as the affordable tuition.

These attributes mentioned by Heaton — job-focused training and affordability — are at the core of community colleges across the country. They are also the primary reasons for the growing appreciation of community colleges in the United States.

The ability to quickly adapt or modify curriculum to provide community-focused job training, in addition to general education courses, has helped community colleges attract growing attention from students, businesses and government officials. And with tuition rates well below the costs at four-year colleges and universities, students save themselves or their parents thousands of dollars by attending community college to earn an associates degree or transferring to a four-year university to complete a bachelor's degree.

Heaton's gift, the largest in BC3 history, targets the \$4.7 million renovation of the library, which has not been updated since it opened in the 1970s. The library work is expected to be completed in the spring of 2016.

In addition to his \$1 million donation toward the library renovation, Heaton, a Butler native,

made an addition gift of \$200,000 toward scholarships from the Logan Family Trust, of which he is a trustee.

The updated library will benefit tens of thousands of BC3 students over the coming years. And adding to the fund for scholarships is another way that Heaton's gifts will continue to help students and the broader Butler community for years to come.

The money is clear evidence of Heaton's pride in the Butler community and the college. The size of Heaton's gift to BC3 can be matched by few, but it's a reminder that all gifts, no matter the size, make a difference.