

# New Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center opens pupils’ eyes to nature, architecture

Jan. 16, 2018



John L. Wise III, center, is shown during the March 23, 2018, dedication ceremony of the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center on Butler County Community College’s main campus. The \$2.3 million nature-infused center was funded in part by a \$1 million gift from Wise and his family.

(Butler, PA) Taryn Tiche yanks red-and-white mittens from her 4-year-old fingers, grabs a pencil from a blue plastic basket and, at 8:12 a.m. Jan. 16, becomes the first preschooler to sign in to what John L. Wise III two months later will call “so impressive” and “beautiful” – Butler County Community College’s new \$2.3 million Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center, named in honor of Wise’s late sister.

Taryn’s eyes are the first among preschoolers to behold the 8-foot tall, rough-hewn sliding pine barn doors; the beige, ivory and wine-hued wedges of sandstone affixed to the base of planters; and the red amaryllis, English ivy and hermit crab on the sill of three vertical windows framing a

purplish snowy field outside the 6,500-square-foot facility that John L Wise III would visit during a formal dedication March 23.

“Everyone just loves the big windows, looking outside to the tranquil scene and the light coming in,” said Judy Zuzack, director of the children’s center since 2003.

Funded in part by a \$1 million gift from John L. Wise III and family, the nature-infused Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center becomes a permanent location for 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in the state-licensed preschool and childcare center, and represents its third home since a 60-foot oak tree fell on Armstrong Lodge during off-hours in May 2010.



Taryn Tiche, 4, is shown at 8:13 a.m. Jan. 16, 2018, as she became the first preschooler to enter the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center on Butler County Community College’s main campus in Butler Township. The \$2.3 million nature-infused center was funded in part by a \$1 million gift from John L. Wise III and family.

The Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center is also more than double the size of its most recent predecessor, housed in BC3’s original bookstore. The Keystone STAR 4 program – the highest licensing rating given by the state Departments of Education and of Human Services – was then temporarily relocated to two classrooms within BC3’s Arts & Hospitality Building during construction of the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center.

**“It is beautiful. I am very impressed”**

Among the more than 60 guests attending the March 23 dedication ceremony was John L. Wise III, who for the first time toured the finished facility bearing the name of his sister, a teacher who passed away in November 2014 in Willison, Vt.

“I was here during the construction phase,” Wise said. “I think the architects did a beautiful job. ... It is just so impressive to see how light and airy and big the space is. It is beautiful. I am very impressed.”

It’s “awesome,” Amy’s cousin, Chip Wise, said as John L. Wise III met with preschoolers and took photographs with his cell phone. “It is open and it’s bright. A nice place for the children.”

The Wise family, BC3 President Dr. Nick Neupauer told the audience at the dedication ceremony, has always been an important part of “this wonderful community college.” John Wise Jr. served as a BC3 trustee from 1965 through 1969. John L. Wise III served as a board member of BC3’s Education Foundation from 1996 to 2009.

“This beautiful, state-of-the-art Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center will live on,” Neupauer said, “for generations and generations.”

For generations to come, preschoolers will step across light-colored oak flooring to play in sand tables, stare at a series of three hanging Plexiglas panels containing varying lengths of birch twigs, and gaze upward to triangular navy, gray and light blue sails suspended from an 18-foot-high white ceiling.

## “This is a dream come true”

The Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center also features an observation room, from which parents and BC3 child development education and early childhood education students can study the preschoolers’ interactions with one another without entering the youngsters’ space.

John L. Wise III and family’s \$1 million gift was among four the BC3 Education Foundation received within in 44 months. Robert R. Heaton in July 2014 donated \$1 million toward what would become the \$6.4 million Heaton Family Learning Commons; Janice Phillips Larrick donated \$1 million in September 2017 toward the proposed Victor K. Phillips Nursing and Allied Health Building; and Tim Shaffer in February donated \$1 million toward what became The Shaffer School of Nursing and Allied Health.

Amy Wise’s passion for teaching young children, “especially teaching children about the natural world,” is shared by her instructors, Zuzack said, and is “something that we aspire to each day in our program here at the CCLC. Our new facility, designed with Amy’s passion in mind, has space for teachers to plan and implement creative learning experiences for children, surrounded by nature both indoors and outdoors.”

Indoor planters will allow instructors to expand a gardening curriculum throughout the school year, “surrounded by elements such as stone, plants and sunlight, which helps the children and the staff to feel calm and connected,” Zuzack said. “This beautiful space allows us to expand our offerings to children, to promote their sense of wonder and curiosity about the world. For early childhood teachers, this is a dream come true.”

Walking through the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Center, “you will see things that Amy Wise embodied,” said Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation Inc. “Her love of young children, her love of nature, all things we’ve tried to incorporate in this building.”

Joey Martin, 5, likes the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Center because “It is so big.”

Sean Monahan, 4, said “It is cool because it has a barn for circle time.”

And Reed McGraw, 5: “I liked it better than the old school. Because it is nice and it is bigger.”

It was the very love of nature that Amy Wise had that drew Taryn Tiche to the red amaryllis, English ivy and hermit crab on the sill of three vertical windows framing a purplish snowy field moments after she signed her name Jan. 16 on a card featuring a 1970s-era yellow smiley face sticker placed in the top-left corner.

“When I walked in here today I saw the hermit crab out of his shell,” Taryn said. “But when I walked straight over to him, he went straight back into his shell. I wish I had a hermit crab.”