

BC3 student, 52, “rose to the top,” receives Governor’s Achievement Award

Formerly dislocated worker lauds college program for credentials that led to job

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Kenneth Rogers, 52, of Mercer, a graduate of Butler County Community College’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, observes a vertical semiautomatic band saw slicing 5-inch by 3-inch square structural steel tubing at Miller Industries, Hermitage, on Friday, June 1, 2018.

(Mercer, PA) A 52-year-old Mercer County resident has become an advocate of a Butler County Community College program that enabled him to gain credentials needed to land a family-sustaining job after a 14-month layoff and which led to his Governor's Achievement Award from the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association and state Department of Labor and Industry.

Kenneth Rogers, who completed BC3's manufacturing pre-apprenticeship certificate program at BC3 @ LindenPointe, Hermitage, was among eight Pennsylvanians recognized with a 2018 Governor's Achievement Award during the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association's "Journey to the Top" conference in Hershey on May 17.

The PWDA and Department of Labor and Industry presented Governor's Achievement Awards in youth and adult categories. Rogers was selected from 20 adult nominees, said Roseann B. Cordelli, the association's director of government and public relations.

"He rose to the top in the adult category," Cordelli said.

Rogers, said Jerry Oleksiak, secretary of the state Department of Labor and Industry, "worked hard and took advantage of the programs offered to him to achieve great success in his career and personal development."

Six other 2018 Governor's Achievement Awards were presented, including those by the state Department of Aging and the state Department of Human Resources.

"He did not have the proper credentials"

The West Central Job Partnership Inc., Sharon, nominated Rogers, who sought assistance from Pennsylvania CareerLink in Sharon after he became dislocated from a machinist position at a Mercer County manufacturer.

"He did not have the proper credentials in machinist work," said Sheila Lobota, a case manager at West Central Job Partnership with the Pennsylvania CareerLink. "He was out there looking for employment when he came to see me."

Rogers sought employment every day, he said – but without offering relevant credentials to a prospective employer.



Kenneth Rogers, 52, of Mercer, a graduate of Butler County Community College's manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, measures 5-inch by 3-inch square structural steel tubing at Miller Industries, Hermitage, on Friday, June 1, 2018.

“That might have been a problem there,” he said. “Things are more high-tech now, compared to what it was.”

Yet he applied “everywhere,” he said, estimating he completed about 70 applications for employment for positions such as a millworker, laborer, “anything and everything. Everywhere and anywhere.”

“Hon, I am 50 years old”

To qualify for the Governor’s Achievement Award from the association and state Department of Labor and Industry, nominees must have received assistance such as that offered by Pennsylvania CareerLink between Jan. 1, 2017, and Dec. 31, 2017, according to Cordelli. The adult recipient of the award must be placed into employment at a sustainable family wage with benefits and retain that employment for six months.

The nominee must also have exhibited extraordinary personal effort to use the resources provided through the workforce development system to achieve employment or an educational goal, Cordelli said.

Rogers saw an advertisement promoting BC3’s free manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, in which he could earn National Tooling and Machining Association credentials in basic math, blueprint reading, precision machining technology and quality control-statistical process control-inspection.



Kenneth Rogers, 52, of Mercer, a graduate of Butler County Community College’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, operates the controls of a vertical semiautomatic band saw at Miller Industries, Hermitage, on Friday, June 1, 2018.

He was also intrigued by the opportunity to gain National Institute of Metalworking Skills credentials in measurement, materials and safety; job planning, benchwork and layout; and certificates in OSHA 10 – the recognition, avoidance, abatement and prevention of health hazards in workplaces – and in industrial fork truck operation.

“It was a good program to get into,” Rogers said. “I could learn a lot and earn credentials. It was a free class funded by the government. I was laid off.”

He discussed BC3’s eight-week manufacturing pre-apprenticeship certificate program with his wife, Lynda.



Kenneth Rogers, 52, of Mercer, a graduate of Butler County Community College’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, is shown Friday, June 1, 2018, next to a car carrier siderail manufactured at Miller Industries, Hermitage.

“Hon, I am 50 years old. I don’t know if I could do this program,” Rogers said.

“She said, ‘Yes, you can.’”

Farrell grad decides to enroll in BC3 program

Rogers “really had to have some serious arm-twisting and had apprehension in returning to school,” said Eric Karmecy, division chief, operations and special project division of the West Central Job Partnership. “There was his age, and he had been out of school for a number of years. He had some insecurities with regard to returning to a classroom.”

BC3’s pre-apprenticeship manufacturing certificate program, Lobota, would be beneficial to Rogers.

“He would have a better go at it if he had these credentials under his belt,” she said.

The secretary of the state Department of Labor and Industry agreed.

“Programs such as Butler County Community College’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program provide individuals with valuable skills and credentials they need to obtain family-sustaining jobs,” Oleksiak said, “and help meet the employment needs of regional employers.”

On Nov. 14, 2016, the 1984 graduate of Farrell Area High School enrolled in the 128-hours-plus program.

“This isn’t a sink-or-swim type of deal,” Karmecy said. “If you can’t swim the whole way, we are going to have somebody there along your sides. I think that really gave him the encouragement that he needed to take the plunge and end up registering in the program.”

86 have chosen BC3’s free program

Eighty-six students have participated in BC3’s 12 manufacturing pre-apprenticeship certificate program courses since Oct. 24, 2016, said Kelly

McKissick, the college’s coordinator of professional education and certificate programs. The program is funded by grants through the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board, Butler, and through the West Central Job Partnership.

BC3’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program is designed for students to develop entry-level skills that enable them to start a manufacturing career in jobs such as machine operators, machinist apprentices, quality apprentices, CNC apprentices, assemblers and maintenance and press operators.

“Employers have become familiar with this program and are waiting to hire our students, sometimes presenting offers before the program is completed,” McKissick said. “Most starting wages are significantly above minimum wage for even entry-level positions as machine operators, apprentices and assemblers. The skills obtained in this course present the opportunity for individuals to acquire family-sustaining jobs that they may not have been qualified for without these credentials.”

Scott Covert, a training coordinator at Penn United Technologies, Cabot, Butler County, has instructed eight of BC3’s courses, which have been held at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage, BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle and on BC3’s main campus in Butler Township. Rogers joined BC3 manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program participants who are military veterans, fast-food workers, chefs and salespeople, Covert said.



Kenneth Rogers, 52, of Mercer, center, a graduate of Butler County Community College’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, is shown Thursday, May 17, 2018, in Hershey with Jerry Oleksiak, left, secretary of the state Department of Labor; and Sheila Lobota, a case manager at West Central Job Partnership with the Pennsylvania CareerLink in Sharon.

“If you can think of it,” Covert said, “we have had it. We have had some right out of high school with no prior work experience. We have had single mothers come in.”

“He held up his certifications”

Through his 100 percent attendance, Rogers re-learned about dovetails when reading blueprints – “Now it is coming back to me,” he said he recalled – and studied up to three hours a night, Covert said.

“He was putting in almost half as much time on his own at home as he was spending in the classroom,” Covert said of Rogers, who on Jan. 20, 2017, completed the program and received his NTMA and NIMS credentials, and his OSHA and industrial fork truck certifications.

Graduates of BC3’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship certificate program have become machining apprentices, machine operators, assemblers, quality technicians and, in Rogers’ case, a fabricating saw operator at Miller Industries, Hermitage, which manufactures nearly 4,000 car- and truck carriers per year.

Rogers has also become a proponent of BC3’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, Karmecy said.

“He spoke at our board meeting,” Karmecy said of Rogers. “He came in to speak to another class of prospective students that we were getting to run in the next cohort, and was as proud as could be. He brought in his certifications. He spoke favorably about the class and the instructors. He held up his certifications very proudly and told these prospective students, ‘Hey look. This is what you could do. I did it. I knew that when this NIMS certification came in the mail, I knew that I had achieved my goal.’”

“I don’t know where I would be right now”

Today Rogers works 50 “sometimes 56” hours per week, up to six days per week, using a vertical semiautomatic band saw to slice 5-inch by 3-inch square structural steel tubing into lengths that will become siderails on car- and truck carriers.

Had he not enrolled in BC3’s manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, Rogers said, “I don’t know where I would be right now.”

Rogers, Karmecy said, is a perfect example of someone “who took a humble position, came in here, took some risks, and came out a lot better on the other end as a result of it.

“I know we have several people from that group sign up for the next cohort and I attribute them signing up to some of the words Ken told them,” Karmecy said. “He was not only able to succeed in the program but he was also able to influence others to take the same risk that he did. Rogers, Covert added, “was probably the hardest working student that we have had. The course did not come easily to him. But through the work that he put in through those eight weeks, he became very successful.”

BC3’s next manufacturing pre-apprenticeship certificate course begins July 16. It will be held at BC3’s main campus and at Penn United. For more information or to register, call McKissick at 724-287-8711, Ext. 8171 or email kelly.mckissick@bc3.edu.