

Olney Central College KNIGHTLINE



June 2023

CALENDAR

JUNE

19 - Juneteenth, College Closed

30 - Midterm

JULY

4 - Independence Day, College Closed

10-28 - OCC/OAC Summer Children's Theatre Workshop, 1-3:30 p.m.

20 - Last Day to Withdraw from 8-week Summer Semester Classes

28 - OCC/OAC Summer Children's Theatre Workshop Presents *The Music Man Jr.*, OCC Theater, 7 p.m.

28 - Last Day of Summer Semester Classes

29 - OCC/OAC Summer Children's Theatre Workshop Presents *The Music Man Jr.*, OCC Theater, 2 p.m.

31 - Final Exams

31 - Fall Semester Textbook Sales Begin

31 - Summer Textbook Buyback, OCC Bookstore, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

AUGUST

1 - Summer Textbook Buyback, OCC Bookstore, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

17 - Fall Semester Classes Begin

Retiring Coach Dennis Conley left lasting impact on players and OCC

On June 30, an era will come to an end as Olney Central College Baseball Coach Dennis Conley retires after 43 years with the Blue Knights.

When Conley started his coaching career at OCC, he was only a couple of years older than his players. In the intervening years, the Charleston native has devoted countless hours into building the college's athletic programs and developing top-notch players both on the field and in the classroom.

Named to the National Junior College Athletic Association Coaches Hall of Fame in 2010, Conley leaves the game as the second winningest active coach in the NJCAA and No. 3 on the all-time list. In March, he earned his 1,500th win. Conley wraps up his illustrious career with an impressive 1,518 wins and 40 consecutive winning seasons.

"I'm most proud of the fact we have been good consistently and our kids have been well-rounded, good students, citizens and players," Conley said. "I've enjoyed meeting a lot of people in the recruiting process over 43 years. I enjoy seeing the kids leave here and have success at all different levels. The experiences they have here carry over in their everyday lives as they start families and build their futures."

Conley joined OCC in 1980 after receiving his master's degree from Eastern Illinois University, where he was a member of the Panthers' baseball team. Through the years, he has taken on many roles at OCC, including women's basketball coach, assistant men's basketball coach, sports information director and academic tutor. He has served as OCC's athletic director for the last 39 years.

In 2008, Olney Central College and the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges District recognized Conley's outstanding achievements on and off the field renaming OCC's baseball diamond in his honor.

"It's hard to put into words what 43 years means to an institution," said OCC Softball Coach Nick Short, who has worked alongside Conley in the Athletic Program for the past 15 years and will succeed him as Athletic Director. "When I'm out recruiting for softball, it is rare not to have someone come up and ask me about Coach Conley. The longevity is impressive, but to sustain consistent and regularly winning teams and have so many players move on and continue their careers is remarkable.

"We had a conference meeting recently and everyone there had comments like 'Coach Conley's are big shoes to fill, he is a great guy, and he is one of the good people in the



Dennis Conley was honored during a retirement reception on May 5 at OCC. Conley has served as Olney Central College's baseball coach since 1980.

See Page 2

business.' Everyone in that meeting had asked him for advice over the years. It's hard to replace that kind of experience. I'm glad he will still be around to lean on."

During Conley's tenure at OCC, 315 players moved on to four-year schools on baseball scholarships and 45 players signed professional contracts including Clint Barmes and Jerad Eickhoff, who played in the major leagues, and Phil Britton, who was named as Conley's successor last month.

"Coach Conley is on the Mt. Rushmore of people for me not just in baseball, but in life," Britton said. "I think he is probably one of the most underrated coaches, but people in the baseball world know how big he is and how many people he has helped over the years. I've been able to work my whole life in baseball, doing something I love, and I'm grateful to him for that. He gave me the opportunity to come out and play college ball in my hometown. He took a chance on a 165-pound, 5-foot-10 senior and those chances don't always work out."

Britton's ties to OCC baseball stretch back to his father, who as an OCC student, kept the scorebook for Conley during his first year at the college.

"Growing up and getting to see the guy from the time I was 8, 9, 10 — I have a crazy amount of respect for him. Here is where a lot of lessons were learned when I was in high school and college, and Coach Conley wasn't afraid to help me learn them," Britton said. "My mom and dad supported him in helping me learn those lessons because they knew he had my best interests at heart. He was very blunt, direct and to the point."

As head coach, Britton feels fortunate to still have Conley's counsel.

"I'm glad I can call him any time," Britton said. "He is going to enjoy some time away, but will still help us with recruiting and seeing players. He has earned the right to have some time off, but I'm going to need him at prac-



Dennis Conley is pictured with his family during the dedication of Dennis Conley Field in 2008.

tices in a couple of years."

Conley's influence has reached all levels of America's favorite pastime. From Little League to the big leagues, his impact on the game and the lives of his players is immeasurable and will continue to reverberate for years to come.

"If he had an average of just 35 players a year, that's more than 1,500 kids whose lives he has impacted," Britton said. "That's 1,500 husbands and dads. The amount of people he has had an influence on is staggering. That doesn't include the time he worked with students outside of baseball when he was coaching basketball or as athletic director."

OCC alum Shawn Garrett was drafted by the San Diego Padres out of high school. He opted not to sign a contract choosing to pursue a college career at OCC instead.

"In talking to the pro scouts, the name Dennis Conley kept coming up," Garrett recalled. "They said, 'If you are looking for a spot to learn to play the game the right way, OCC and Coach Dennis Conley are the way to go.' That was a major deciding factor for me. I think I came in with the mindset if I wanted to become a professional baseball player, this was the place. Coach Conley demanded effort and was known for winning and devel-

oping players. He was someone who would hold you accountable, but that you could still joke around with. He became a lifelong friend and mentor. I felt like I could call him any time of the day or night. He was there to help solve problems and give advice."

After completing his courses at OCC, Garrett went on to play professionally for 11 years with nine different organizations. He currently lives in St. Peter and is excited his daughter will be playing softball at OCC this fall. He recently returned to Olney to watch one of Coach Conley's final games.

"He coached the same way he has been coaching for the last 40 years," Garrett said. "There was no coasting for him. He always wanted to win and that is how he is ending."

Conley's influence also stretches to places like Stevens Point, Wis., where former Blue Knight Tom Drohner has been a teacher and coach for 28 years. During his tenure, Stevens Point High School's softball team has captured eight state championships.

"Everything I say and do is the stuff Coach Conley taught me," Drohner said. "For me, he was the man. He was the biggest influence of my life. I remember one thing he always said, 'Make good decisions,' and I have applied that to everything in my life.

It sounds so simple, but it was very impactful.”

Drohner recalls fondly the 1987 and 1988 seasons playing for Conley.

“He was perfect for me,” Drohner said. “He was a great motivator and unbelievable friend. I always tried to do whatever I could to make him happy. He was such a huge figure in my life. I loved the game of baseball and I would do whatever I could for Coach Conley to like me. I have so much respect for him. I wanted to get better and I knew he could help me do that. He held me accountable. The impact he had on me is profound. I grew up in a situation where I didn’t have the greatest father figure at that point in my life. He was that father figure I needed. I wanted to impress him, and my work ethic was relentless in that pursuit. I hope I made him proud.”

Kenny Marrs Graham played for the Blue Knights in 2000 and 2001. He received a scholarship to play baseball at Indiana University and after graduating went on to get his master’s degree serving as a grad assistant at the University of Indianapolis.

“The thing I enjoyed most about playing for D.C. was how competitive he was and dialed in every practice, game or showing a new recruit around. Really, anything dealing with winning baseball games. It was a level of focus unmatched,” Graham said. “The detail and understanding under his tutelage has driven a lot of my core coaching values to this day with the biggest one being, ‘It’s the little things that we do that mean anything.’”

Graham not only played at OCC, but also returned as an assistant under Conley.

“Playing and coaching with D.C. were two different, yet similar stories,” he said. “As a player, his office door was always open and he would crack jokes and make you feel part of something bigger than yourself being in his program. That was as long as we were winning baseball games, which we were the majority of the time.”

Graham added, “As an assistant coach, I spent a lot of hours with him

in the office, at breakfast or lunch at different local restaurants that he loved to support. At these meals, I got to know Dennis as a husband, father and grandfather, which he took great pride of being all three. But once the bell rang for baseball, it was all business. He was elite at locking it in when he wanted to. When I was coaching with D.C., I had a lot of student loans and didn’t have a lot of money in my pockets. We never spoke of it, but Dennis knew this and always took care of me buying, if not all, most of the daily meals we had together and more.”

Following his stint as assistant coach, Graham joined the Toronto Blue Jays organization where he served as a minor league hitting coach and manager for seven years. He later served as the minor league hitting coordinator for the Milwaukee Brewers before becoming Director of Player Development with the Detroit Tigers.

“D.C. has had more impact on me and my life than any coach I’ve ever been around. He was always as honest and upfront as anybody I’ve seen in the game of baseball up to the highest level. There are too many examples to name the times that he told me what I didn’t want to hear, but I needed to hear. It is his sixth sense. To this day, every player I coach I look to be as open and honest with them as Dennis was with me.”

Graham added, “There will never be another Dennis Conley. But the impact he made on players, coaches and fans will live and thrive for generations to come throughout the world in life along with all levels of the game of baseball including the major leagues.”

Bryce Labhart is another former Blue Knight who joined Conley’s coaching staff. Labhart played at OCC from 2008 to 2009 and has spent the past 11 years as assistant coach.

“I think what I enjoyed most is his old school nature,” Labhart said of Conley. “As a player, he was hard on you in a good way. As an adult, you see he was trying to make boys into men. As an assistant, I got to see how

much he cares. He is a hardnosed coach, but behind the scenes he is always working to make better players and people. As a player, he taught me the right way to play. He always stressed the importance of going to class and academics were always the first priority.”

For Labhart, one of his best memories of Conley occurred when the Blue Knights won the conference tournament for the first time.

“Coach Conley didn’t show a lot of emotion, but that day you could see it and it was special,” Labhart added.

Labhart said Conley truly cared about his players and their lives.

“On the bus, before and after games, you saw his personal side,” Labhart said. “He would ask players about their families and classes. You also saw his sense of humor. He was very personal with players and that is kind of rare now. He was very personable with everybody. He was my boss, but I also consider him a good friend. We became very close. Those are the things I’m going to miss most.”

As he prepares to step away, Conley is looking forward to spending more time with family, which includes two daughters, their husbands and his five grandchildren. He also intends on playing golf, fishing, catching up with family and watching his grandchildren’s athletic events.

“I will miss the daily challenges working with young people at the school off and on the field. I have been very fortunate,” Conley said. “The college has been good to me. It gave me opportunities at a very young age. The community has also shown us a lot of support over the years, and it was a great place to raise a family.”

Reflecting on Conley’s retirement, Short noted “It was going to happen, but I don’t know if you are ever ready for it. He has left OCC with a firm footing for the future and a pretty long legacy. You always want to leave something better off than when you found it and that is most definitely the case here.”

Students attend PTK Catalyst 2023 Convention



Olney Central College students traveled to Columbus, Ohio last month to attend the Phi Theta Kappa Catalyst 2023 National Convention.

Student attendees included Elizabeth Cook, Kevin Hyder, and Robert Wray. Hyder and Wray are both OCC chapter officers. Wray is a regional officer as well.

The annual convention provides students with opportunities for personal and professional development, college transfer guidance from experts, speakers who inspire, election of leaders and opportunities to network and learn from other members of the PTK Community.

A highlight of the convention is the annual Catalyst Scholar Bowl. Wray competed in the event and his team advanced to the final round.

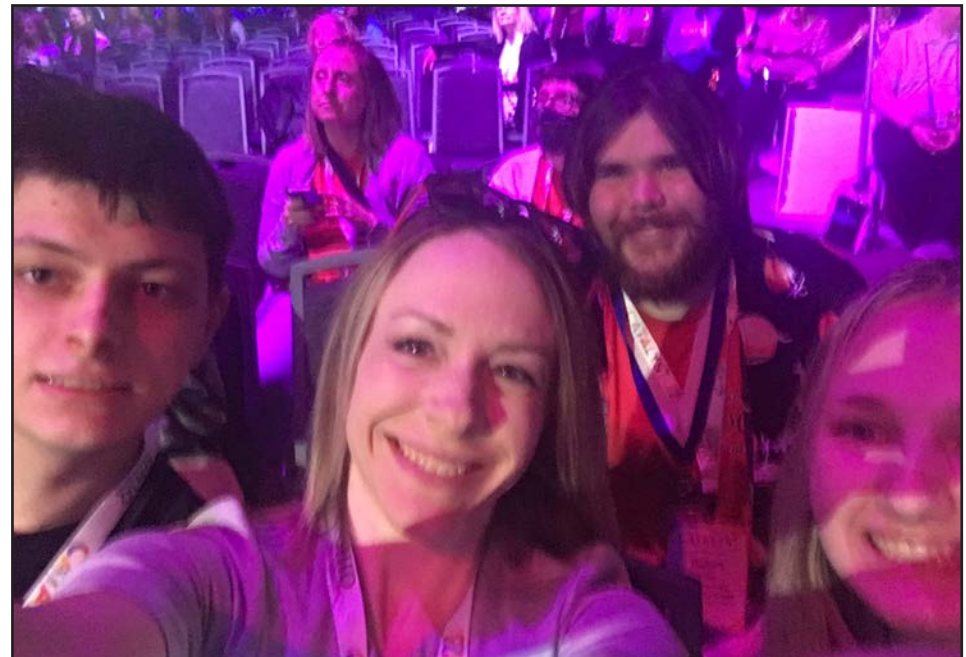
“Of course, the whole trip was fun, but the most enjoyable thing I did at Catalyst was the Catalyst Scholar Bowl,” Wray said. “I decided to compete in the Scholar Bowl just for fun. There was a \$250 scholarship on the line, but that appealed to me less than the opportunity to compete, as I had never done so before.”

Teams were chosen randomly, and Wray was paired with chemistry, art, music and English majors hailing from Oregon, Oklahoma and Washington.

“Participating in conferences through PTK has always been the best part of being involved in the organization,” Wray said. “The conferences are very educational while also being fun.”

This was Wray’s final convention as he graduated in May. This fall he will transfer to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale in pursuit of a doctorate degree in zoology.

The keynote speakers this year included Academy Award-winning



Top, OCC student Robert Wray, far right, competes in the annual Catalyst Scholar Bowl. Above, OCC Phi Theta Kappa’s Kevin Hyder, Advisor Sarah Bergbower, Robert Wray and Elizabeth Cook attend PTK’s annual convention in Columbus, Ohio.

Actor Geena Davis and former eight-year NFL veteran and college All-American Linebacker Manti Te’o.

Cook, a first-time convention goer, especially enjoyed Te’o’s presentation.

Both Cook and Hyder enjoyed the opportunity to visit Columbus.

“There were lots of people and new experiences,” Hyder said. “All around it was a very interesting place.”

Hyder also liked learning about how other PTK chapters operate

and the goals and projects they are undertaking. At OCC, he has enjoyed assisting with the student food pantry.

“If people have the opportunity to join PTK they should go for it and join,” he said.

Hyder was recently elected OCC’s PTK President. He plans to transfer to the University of Illinois in Springfield to major in political science and legal studies in preparation to study law.

OCC students named to All-Illinois Academic Team

Olney Central College students Jiazhen “Cookie” Zerrusen and Carlene Weiler have been named to the All-Illinois Academic Team by Phi Theta Kappa, the international two-year college honor society.

Zerrusen and Weiler both of Olney, were selected from among community college students across the state on the basis of academic achievement, volunteer work, campus activities, honors and awards. The All-Illinois Academic Team initiative honors outstanding Illinois community college students and highlights the high-quality education provided by the 48 public community colleges and the six private two-year colleges in the state. The pair were awarded metals and certificates in recognition of their accomplishment.

A native of China, Zerrusen has been living in the United States since 2015. She recently finished her first year as a nursing student and plans to complete her Associate Degree in Nursing in May 2024.

“It was an honor I don’t think I deserve,” Zerrusen said of her selection to the All-Illinois team. “I’m glad I have the opportunity to study nursing and to do something I enjoy, and I am good at. It is a field I have a passion for. I am lucky and very blessed.”

Last year Zerrusen served as PTK secretary and was instrumental in establishing OCC’s student lounge and food pantry. She has been a work study student for both the OCC Library and Student Services. Zerrusen also serves as a Board Member for SWAN, an agency that assisted her during her divorce.

“I’m glad I can give back to the community,” she said. “I like Olney and I really appreciate OCC and my classmates. OCC has done a lot for me. I would not have made it this far without all the positive support I’ve received. I am very grateful. Hopefully, I will have the opportunity to give back. This country needs lots of nurses, so hopefully I can help.”

Zerrusen chose to pursue a career in nursing as it offers many career paths and will enable her to support herself and her 5-year-old son.

“He is a big inspiration to me and big reason why I am doing this,” she said. “I’m not sure what I will do in the future, but I will find it. I’m very determined. I’m not afraid and I’m willing to try. I want him to see how I achieved the American Dream from scratch and maybe serve as an inspiration to others.”

While attending OCC, Weiler has been a member of the Lady Knights Softball Team and Student Senate. She also served as a work study student in Student Services.

“I was excited and surprised that I received this honor,” said Weiler, who completed her associate degree in May. “It’s exciting to be selected.”

Weiler plans to transfer to Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville where she will pursue a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice with a minor in forensics. Eventually, she hopes to work in the field of crime scene investigations.

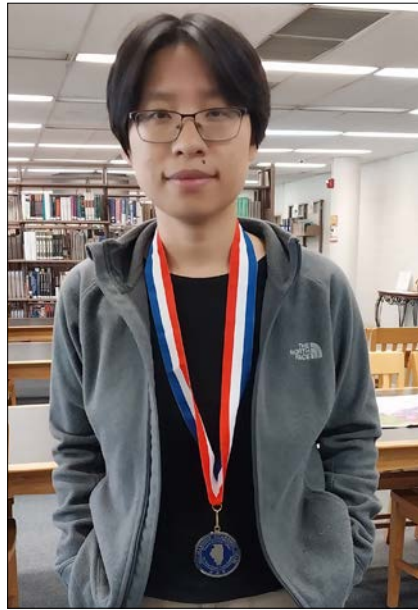
“I’ve really enjoyed my criminal justice classes at OCC,” she said. “I’ve built relationships with my instructors and am excited to move forward.”

As a member of PTK, Weiler enjoyed assisting with various community service projects especially when the group collected items to help those in need during the holidays.

“I’ve really enjoyed my time here,” she said. “I’ve made lasting relationships and had the opportunity to get close to the instructors and the advisors here.”

The All-USA Illinois Academic Team is sponsored annually by Phi Theta Kappa, USA Today and the American Association of Community Colleges.

The All-State Academic Team is a division of the Academic All-USA Team for Community, Technical and Junior Colleges. It seeks to honor outstanding community college students who show intellectual rigor in their course of study, demonstrate academic, leadership and civic growth and who extend their community college education to better themselves, their schools and their communities.



Cookie Zerrusen



Carlene Weiler

Davis Family Scholarship Recipients

Congratulations to Olney Central College student Julie Estay, of Neoga. She is the recipient of the OCC Foundation's Davis Family Radiography Scholarship, which is one of three scholarships given in memory of former OCC President Dr. Jackie L. Davis. Dr. Davis' daughter, Jessica, is a proud 2010 OCC graduate who is currently employed as a Radiographic Technologist in the Cardiac Cath Lab at Springfield Memorial Hospital. Presenting the award is OCC Dean of Instruction Dr. Michael Conn.



Congratulations to Olney Central College student Jessica Martin, of Tuscola. She is a recipient of the OCC Foundation's Davis Family Education Scholarship, which is one of three scholarships given in memory of former OCC President Dr. Jackie L. Davis. Dr. Davis was employed by IECC District #529 for 30 years, working in both administration and faculty at Lincoln Trail College before moving to the District Office in Olney and later serving as OCC's Dean of Instruction and later as President before retiring in 2010. This Scholarship is awarded to a graduating sophomore who is transferring to a four-year university to major in Education. Recipients must have a minimum B average, demonstrate good character and participate in service to either their community or the college. Presenting the award is OCC Dean of Instruction Dr. Michael Conn.



Congratulations to Olney Central College student Meredith Berger, of Olney. She is a recipient of the OCC Foundation's Davis Family Education Scholarship, which is one of three scholarships given in memory of former OCC President Dr. Jackie L. Davis. Dr. Davis was employed by IECC District #529 for 30 years, working in both administration and faculty at Lincoln Trail College before moving to the District Office in Olney and later serving as OCC's Dean of Instruction and later as President before retiring in 2010. This Scholarship is awarded to a graduating sophomore who is transferring to a four-year university to major in Education. Recipients must have a minimum B average, demonstrate good character and participate in service to either their community or the college. Presenting the award is OCC Interim President Roger Eddy.

Davis Family Scholarship Recipients

Congratulations to OCC student Abram Smith of Flora. He is a recipient of the OCC Foundation's Davis Family Engineering Scholarship, which is one of three scholarships given in memory of former OCC President Dr. Jackie L. Davis. Dr. Davis' son, Daniel, is a proud 2004 OCC graduate who is currently employed by General Motors as an Electrical Engineer. This Scholarship is awarded to a graduating sophomore who is transferring to a four-year university to major in Engineering. Recipients must have a minimum 3.0 GPA. Smith plans to major in Mechanical Engineering. Presenting the award is OCC Physics Professor Rob Mason.



Congratulations to Olney Central College student Colby Steber, of Claremont. He is a recipient of the OCC Foundation's Davis Family Engineering Scholarship, which is one of three scholarships given in memory of former OCC President Dr. Jackie L. Davis. Dr. Davis' son, Daniel, is a proud 2004 OCC graduate who is currently employed by General Motors as an Electrical Engineer. This Scholarship is awarded to a graduating sophomore who is transferring to a four-year university to major in Engineering. Recipients must have a minimum 3.0 GPA. Steber plans to major in Electrical Engineering. Presenting the award is OCC Physics Professor Rob Mason.



Coleman attends conference

While attending the SUN Lateral Conference in Houston, Texas, OCC Nursing Professor Becky Coleman had the fortunate chance to meet Dr. Jennifer Arnold. Arnold delivered an excellent presentation on healthcare today and simulation. Arnold was featured in the TLC series, "Little Couple."



Nick Short named OCC Athletic Director

Nick Short has been named Olney Central College's new Athletic Director effective July 1.

Short brings extensive experience to the position. He is in his 15th year as head softball coach and his 17th year as a Life Science Professor at OCC. During his first two years at the college, Short was a volunteer assistant for the softball team.

Short succeeds longtime Baseball Coach Dennis Conley, who is retiring June 30, and has served as OCC's Athletic Director for 39 years.

"I'm looking forward to the new challenges," Short said. "I think we have a good foundation to continue to build on. My main goal is to keep the ship moving in the right direction and continue what Coach Conley has been doing in his 43 years here."

For Short, that includes continuing to emphasize strong academics within the athletic programs. OCC student athletes earned a combined 3.50 GPA for the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 semesters. The Women's Basketball team finished the Spring Semester with an outstanding 3.82 GPA, one of the highest in the program's history.

"Academics is something we do very well, and will continue to do well," Short added.

In the coming months, Short hopes to get out in the community more and increase OCC athletics' presence on social media.

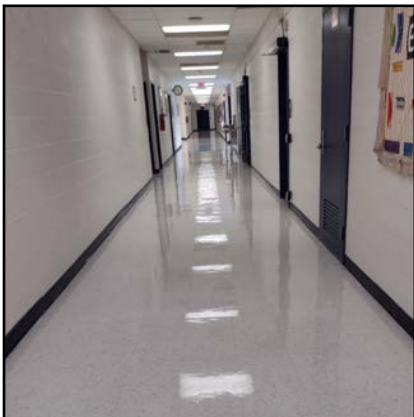
"We are going to add the missing pieces to make us more competitive and attractive to recruits," he added.

Originally from Hamilton, Short received his associate's degree from Lincoln College where he was a member of the baseball team. He attended Eastern Illinois University, earning his bachelor's degree in zoology and his master's degree in biological sciences with a cellular/molecular biology concentration.



Sprucing Up

OCC's hallways shine after the floors were recently refinished. Tina Evans says she is happy with the results. She said her crew did a great job and she is thankful for their help.



Nursing Guest Speaker

Carle-Richland Memorial Hospital's Chief Nursing Officer Carrie Miller recently shared her valuable insights into the job interviewing process with OCC nursing students. She was joined by OCC Nursing Alumni Joan Sager, Samantha York and Hayle Dunham, who are thriving in their careers at Carle-RMH.



Phil Britton named OCC Baseball Coach

Olney Central College Baseball has always been a big part of Phil Britton's life — from attending OCC Little League camps to playing for the Blue Knights and eventually serving as a hitting coach for the same youth camps he attended as a child.

Now, the Olney native is stepping into an even bigger role as he succeeds legendary Coach Dennis Conley who will retire this month after 43 years at the helm of Blue Knights' Baseball.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity the administration has given me here," Britton said. "A bunch of people applied for the position and to be given the job and the opportunity to follow D.C. is hard to describe. It's wild to even think about."

Britton added, "I've always sat in the seat across from Coach Conley and now I'm walking in there following a Hall of Fame coach. It's very humbling following him. I am very fortunate to have spent a career only in baseball and I have that guy to thank."

Britton played for the Blue Knights during the 2004 and 2005 seasons. He was named GRAC freshman of the year and earned Second team NJCAA All-America honors. The Atlanta Braves selected him in the 36th round of the 2004 draft. In his sophomore year at OCC, he was 30th in the NJCAA in batting average hitting .430 and 50th in home runs with 10, earning First Team NJCAA honors. He earned All-Region 24 team honors and All-Region tournament team honors for both the 2004 and 2005 seasons.

In 2005, Britton signed with the Atlanta Braves organization as a catcher and remained in their minor league system until 2009. In 2010, he joined the Baltimore Orioles organization. The following year he spent playing independent baseball between the Fargo-Morehead Redhawks and the Evansville Otters.

Since retiring from playing professional baseball in 2011, Britton has served as Catching Coordinator/Field Coordinator for the Evansville Otters. In January 2012, he became owner and operator of Britton's Bullpen Incorporated, an indoor practice facility providing instructional classes and operating nine traveling teams.

Originally located in Olney, the enterprise has expanded to include locations in Boonville and Fort Branch, Ind. Britton's Bullpen has served as the OCC Baseball and Softball indoor training facility for 11 years.

Britton is excited for the new opportunity. He has been working closely with Coach Conley as the program transitions to new leadership and fills the roster for the coming season.

"In between recruiting and putting together prospect days and camps, I have been taking a lot of notes from Coach Conley while he is here," Britton said. "The program has had stability and a blue-collar, hard-work brand of baseball is already here. We just have to continue it. I'm going to take what I've learned from Coach Conley and, with my own experience, try to update our brand of baseball. We will try to figure out how to get the players involved in the community, helping with Little League or youth camps and find ways for those guys to help locally."

Britton is thrilled to be working with the players helping them grow both on and off the field.

"It is important to make it really clear what they can expect from us and what we expect from our players, both new and returning," he said. "I'm looking forward to the challenges of developing players and helping high school kids transition into adults."

Britton earned an associate degree from OCC in May 2005. Following his playing career, he continued his education with classes at Eastern Illinois University.



OCC/OAC Summer Children's Theater Workshop starts July 10

Registration for the OCC/OAC Summer Children's Theatre Workshop and its performance of *The Music Man, Jr!* is now open.

The three-week workshop is designed to foster creativity, passion, and confidence. During the workshop, students will have the opportunity to learn and experience a variety of skills attributed to the theatre arts

including costume design, set design, stage movement and choreography, music direction, stage direction, and so much more.

The workshop will conclude at the end of the three weeks with two fully-staged performances.

Children entering third grade through entering ninth grade may participate in the theatre workshop.

The workshop will meet from 1 to 3:30 p.m. weekdays July 10-28. Performances are at 7 p.m. July 28 and 2 p.m. July 29.

Registration forms are available at www.iecc.edu/occ/theater.

For more information, like the OAC & OCC Summer Children's Theatre Workshop Facebook page (@oacocccsummerchildrenstheatre).

I have really enjoyed my time here at Olney Central as Interim President. There are so many dedicated professionals at OCC that work hard every day to fulfill the IECC Mission of delivering exceptional education and services to improve the lives of our students and strengthen our communities. The award-winning faculty is supported by a caring and compassionate staff who strive every day to assist students in reaching their goals. A great example is the combined grade point averages of our student athletes. Incoming Athletic Director Nick Short and retiring A.D. Dennis Conley report that the Team GPAs for the combined fall semester of 2022 and spring semester of 2023 were outstanding. The baseball team was 3.47, softball 3.52, men's basketball 3.29, and women's basketball 3.74. As an athletic department, for all sports for the fall and spring, the combined GPA was 3.50. Congratulations to everyone, this is truly a team effort led by coaches, faculty, advisors, and all staff. High expectations yield great results.



Roger Eddy

The community is extremely supportive of OCC in many ways as well. The OCC Foundation presents tens of thousands of scholarship dollars to students attending OCC on an annual basis and provides direct support to athletic and academic programs. The OCC Foundation mini grants once again this year provided over \$20K in direct support for CTE, academic courses, and beautification projects. I had a chance to share what is happening at OCC recently at a Rotary Club meeting. There are so many positive things to talk about, from the completion of multiple deferred maintenance and beautification projects to the recently adopted meta-majors and the new IECC division format. Of course, we discussed the challenges faced regarding additional deferred maintenance projects, enrollment, quality housing solutions for students and finding high quality personnel to serve our mission. I have no doubt that in future years these challenges will be met.



Mike Kurtz and Roger Eddy

As far as beautification and maintenance projects, I have a couple of highlights to report. New carpeting has been installed in the Student Union, where walls have also been painted and brand-new modern furniture is being installed in early August. Plus, new entry doors are scheduled to be installed in this area later this summer. The Student Union will have a new and modern look when students return in the fall for orientation which is scheduled for Aug. 8 and 9, which will come sooner than we expect.





A new mural has been installed on the first floor of Wattleworth Hall near the bookstore. The mural depicts the recently adopted IECC Meta-Majors. It is a great way to remind students of the intentional focus of their academic path and to beautify the campus.



The entrance lobby to the Learning Resource Center, which also serves as lounge area for the Nursing Program was also upgraded with old wooden cases removed, the area repainted and new modern furniture added. Work has also begun on the restoration of the Hoffmann Prairie.

Intersession has already concluded, and summer session is underway. The free tuition offered for some of our courses was a success. Our Summer Youth Explorer Camps have record enrollments. People are hungry for activity since things have returned to “normal.” We are thrilled that so many of the youth in our communities will be on campus this summer for these camps.

The two synchronous learning pilot courses taught this spring at OCC were successful and we have expanded the number of these courses offered to area high schools to 12 for the fall semester. Several courses will also be shared synchronously using these rooms between IECC campuses. Over the next few weeks, we will work with area high schools on enrollment and to see if there are other ways that we can use these new rooms to provide opportunities to students.