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Barton Foundation honors Gary and Anna Burke with Distinguished Service Award

May 12, 2017

Story by Micah Oelze

Photo by Brandon Steinert

The Barton Community College Foundation honored Gary Burke with the 2017 Distinguished Service Award during Barton's 47th commencement Friday.

The Distinguished Service Award was created in 1981 by the Barton Community College Foundation to recognize individuals who have shown genuine regard for, and have performed outstanding service to Barton Community College. The Barton Foundation Board of Directors selects the recipient from nominations received.

Gary was born in Monett, Mo. and moved to Great Bend when he was one year old. Anna was born in Great Bend. She and Gary grew up in Great Bend and graduated from Great Bend High School. After graduation in 1966, Gary joined the Navy and served during the Vietnam War. Upon his return to Great Bend he began dating Anna – they married in 1971. Gary and Anna have three children and two grandchildren.

Gary has been involved in many businesses in Great Bend. In 1978 he opened GB Trenching and after selling that business in 1984, he was employed by Farmers Bank and Trust for four years. He became a partner in Great Bend Casing Pullers in 1988 and later became an agent for New England Financial Services. In 1997 he became a partner in Great Plains Inspection and Butterfly Supply and several years later became sole owner of both companies. Gary sold these businesses and retired in April of 2014. Since his retirement he has devoted his time to volunteer work.

Since starting his first business in 1978 Gary has been involved in many aspects of Barton Community College; first as a student taking advantage of his G.I. benefits by attending night classes to earn his degree in 1984. He has served via the Booster Club from 1985 to present and serving as president in 1988. Gary joined the Barton Community College Foundation Board of Directors in 2008, serving as board chair in 2012. Always looking for a way to serve, Gary is currently a member of the Barton Community College Board of Trustees.

Gary and Anna have been life-long involved community members, always giving back to the community they call home. In 2013 they established the Betty L. Miller Memorial Endowment in honor of Gary's mother and have designated funds for a planned gift to the Foundation.

Executive Director of Institutional Advancement Coleen Cape said the generosity and service of the Burkes has been amazing.

“Over the years, before and since Gary's involvement on the Foundation Board, Gary and Anna have been generous and loyal supporters of many Foundation initiatives and the first to come on board in support of its fund-raising efforts,” Cape said. “The Barton Community College Foundation is proud and grateful for this opportunity to honor Gary and Anna Burke with the 2017 Distinguished Service Award, and we hope they know how much they are admired and appreciated.”