

ECC Grad Wins \$5000 “Dirty Jobs” Scholarship

Sabatino (Sam) Cerroni, a recent Elk County Catholic High School and St. Leo School graduate, has been awarded a national Work Ethic Scholarship through the Mike Rowe Works Foundation.

Mike Rowe is famous for his work on the Dirty Jobs series on Discovery Channel, which highlights the value and integrity of manual labor and the trades. Cerroni, who graduated from ECC in 2019, is entering his second year in the building and construction program at Penn College in Williamsport, PA.

According to the Works Foundation, “The Work Ethic Scholarship Program is about recognizing the people who understand the importance of personal responsibility, delayed gratification, a positive attitude, and, of course, work ethic. The hardworking men and women who keep the lights on, water running, and air flowing—the next generation of skilled workers who will work smart and hard. These are the folks we consider rock stars, and we want to reward them.”

According to Cerroni, he has always known that he wanted to work in the trades. “My mom and dad both went to college for engineering,” he said. “They met when they were working at Westinghouse, in Baltimore. They both really value hard work, though, and they have been very supportive of my decision. They recognize that there are great jobs out there for highly trained, skilled workers.”

The application process was rigorous, including an essay and the creation of a video. “It was a lot of work, but it was fun,” Cerroni said. “It even included a cameo from my Uncle Sam, who is the president of Elk County Catholic.”

ECCSS President Sam MacDonald says that the local Catholic school system is unique in its support of the trades.

“I love it when our graduates enter the trades or go directly in to the work force,” he said. “A lot of Catholic schools promise that 100 percent of their kids go off to college. We are proud of our kids who do that, too, but there is more than one way to be smart. Our economy needs people who can do actual work with their hands. ECC is proud to offer those people a Catholic education, too.”

MacDonald added that his contribution to the video speaks to life in Elk County. “A lot of people still think the trades are for people ‘who aren’t college material,’” MacDonald said. “That’s nonsense. My dad was a machinist at E&G Auto Parts in St. Marys. He took me to work when I was little and knew within five minutes I wasn’t cut out to be a machinist. He told my mom, ‘Let’s hope he’s good at school, because he can’t work here.’ I ended up going to Yale because I wasn’t E&G material. No kidding.”

“Think of the ten smartest people you know,” MacDonald said. “If you live in Elk County, I can almost guarantee you that a decent number of those people didn’t go to college. This is a place that values work ethic and skills over credentials and prestige. ECC embraces that. We send kids off to Princeton and Carnegie Mellon and Penn State. We help people become doctors and engineers, and that’s awesome. But the world still needs really smart people like Sam Cerroni to

build and fix things. I think it's great that Mike Rowe and the Works Foundation recognize that and support these kids like this."

Cerroni said that while ECC does not offer an official "shop" or trades program, he felt very well prepared for his studies at Penn College. "A lot of it is math, communication, writing," he said. "I feel like I am able to compete really well with the other kids, and I am confident I am going to be able to find a satisfying, high-paying job when I graduate. I might add a year of concrete when I am finished, but I haven't decided that yet."

Sam Cerroni is the son of Molly and John Cerroni, of Ridgway.