

WPCC fights poor writing

By BEN ESTES

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It is up to the educational system to cure the ills of poor writing society is suffering from, Jack Claiborne told an audience at Western Piedmont Community College in Morganton last Thursday.

Claiborne, associate editor of The Charlotte Observer, spoke to about 80 faculty members, staff members and guests of WPCC at a luncheon to introduce school's writing program for the 1980-81 term. He has been an editorial writer for The Observer for 10 years and writes signed commentaries in the Saturday editions of the newspaper.

Claiborne expressed concern over "our growing inability to express our thoughts and to say what we mean." He called efforts to improve individual writing skills "a challenge facing the whole society."

"Writing is very much on the public's mind these days," Claiborne said. He added that the educational system is being blamed for the failure of many students to learn how to write effectively.

A good knowledge of writing skills can put a person "a leg up" in his profession, Claiborne said. He cited the example of Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, whose excellent writing ability helped make his legal views dominant.

"Writing is not something we do as an end to itself," Claiborne said. "It's an essential ingredient of the learning process."

Claiborne recalled growing up in Mecklenburg County, reading the Bible along with adventure poems and stories. He said this reading taught him to appreciate the rhythms and sounds of words.

"Too many of today's students have never had that experience," Claiborne said. He said that television and other forms of entertainment

have taken a lot of reading time away from youth today.

In the classroom, routine teaching methods such as diagramming sentences and grammar drills can cause students to dislike writing, Claiborne said. "Many students resist writing because their introduction has been painful."

Writing is best taught by letting students practice expressing themselves on paper, and by getting them to revise what they have written several times, Claiborne said. "Almost no one writes anything well the first time out."

After a student has written something, he should get immediate feedback from his instructor, Claiborne said. Teachers should be careful how they criticize; they should say positive as well as negative things about their students' writing, he said.

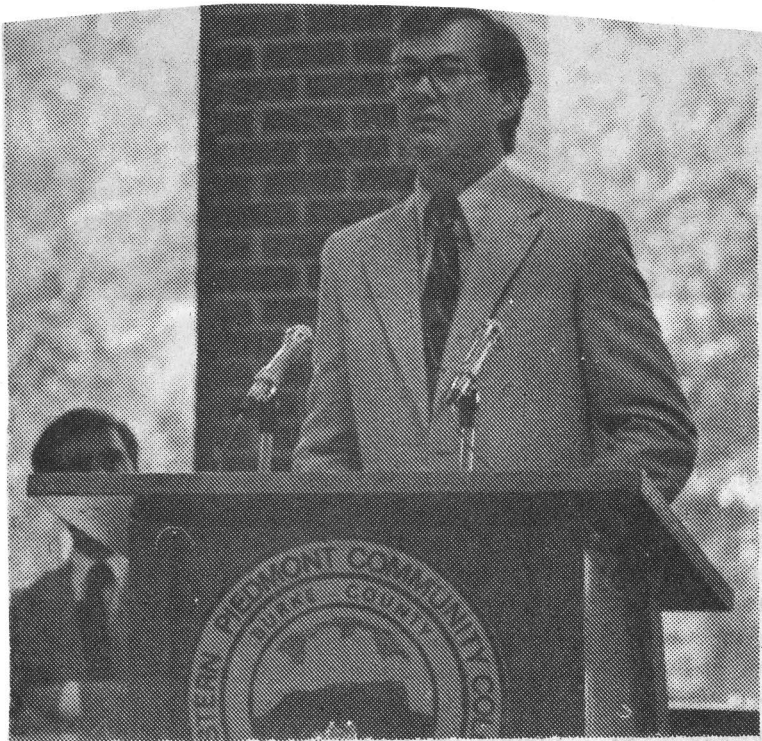
"We throw too much at our students and our writers and intimidate them," Claiborne concluded.

WPCC's writing program for 1980-81 is an expansion of a program initiated in 1979. Originally, the program involved only the Department of English and Humanities, but it is now geared to improve student writing capabilities in all campus departments.

WPCC has been one of forty colleges participating in the Institute of Writing, a joint project of the University of Iowa and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

George Fouts, director of composition at WPCC, has attended a six-month seminar at Iowa and is overseeing the writing program at WPCC.

In September, Fouts will replace Roy McGalliard as director of the Division of Communications, Humanities and Fine Arts, formerly the Department of English and Humanities. McGalliard has resigned his position after 11 years to become an instructor.



Claiborne addresses WPCC audience