

'Open Door' has lightened many minds

WPCC early years, mission remembered

By MARIE PARKHURST
News Herald Staff Writer

Standing in the long line in front of the old school building I didn't have the vaguest idea what the newly formed college was offering me.

I was entering college a novice. I hadn't finished high school the 12-years traditional way. I had dropped out and later received a high school equivalent certificate.

Having never heard of Western Piedmont Community College, I was ready to tackle one of the area four-year colleges when a teacher in a neighboring county advised me to apply at WPCC — a junior college where "you can enter at your academic level and work up to college level if necessary."

I have always considered hers, words of the wise to the not-so-wise.

Then, WPCC officials hadn't come up with a name for their "open door"



Mrs. Parkhurst

policy, and now, 20 years later, it's so ingrained it's taken for granted.

The college just finished a week of activities in celebration of its 20th anniversary. And all during the course of the week as I covered the events for The News Herald, I had flashbacks of hours I spent there as a student.

I remember the classes held in the old Morganton elementary school building which set where the new Burke County Courthouse is now. The floors were dirty, the student center was in the basement and had a stinch that inhibited eating, and the library was hot and noisy — but what fun we had.

Remembering is fun, too, when I recall that quarter break when all the WPCC educational treasures were moved from the old school building to the shiny new structure across town where we walked down clean halls with terrazzo floors; where our much needed breaks were taken in a nicely furnished, fresh-smelling student center; and where the library was quiet, carpeted and comfortably furnished.

I remember too, "burning the mid-

night oil," studying; the instructors who cared if I succeeded; the counselors who were really concerned with my schedule; the president who knew my name and never failed to speak...

Needless to say, I followed the "wise" teacher's advice. That's how I found myself in that long line one chilly September morning of 1968, that's how I met a special friend, and that's how I found myself a graduate of Western Piedmont College three years and one baby later.

But better still, that's how the door of learning was opened up to a student who would have, no doubt, otherwise experienced failure and who knows what else.

The open door policy — the constitution on which WPCC was founded and has remained steadfast — has been the turning point in the lives of thousands.

The social moral principle of shared or common interest, of love for fellow-man talked about by the college's founding president, Dr. Herbert F. Stallworth, at a recent banquet, has meant success instead of failure for many who have passed through those doors of learning and have been a part of WPCC's campus environment.

In remembering Dr. Edward W. Phifer, Stallworth said he recalled a poem about a man who struggled to cross a great chasm then stopped before continuing his journey to take time to bridge the gulf. "In the path I come, there follows a youth to pass this way — I'm building this bridge for him," Stallworth read.

Without being one of those, no one can ever know the gratitude felt by the ones who have knowingly used that bridge in crossing the gulf.

I can think where I am today, and remember from where I came, and can only thank God for instilling in those endearing men the awareness of the need for just such a community college in Burke County, and for the love which moved them into action.

When I think of the bondage of those students in Burke and neighboring counties who have been robbed of an education either by choice or circumstance, my heart is saddened for them.

But I am reassured of their opportunity when I remember the days my family and I struggled and sacrificed so I could finish "just one more quarter" and I became free from the prison walls of "uneducation" and walked into a new world of broadened knowledge.

Yes, I'm well aware of the freedom awarded me in the halls of learning at WPCC, and I wonder if Roy McGalliard knows the real meaning of the words he wrote in the college alma mater, "In the shadows of the mountains where the door stands always open... a place of truth, wisdom — the soul of liberty."



Soon after Western Piedmont Community College was founded, the college began offering adult basic education throughout the community. Here is one of the first orientation sessions for instructors in the Continuing Education division; it was held in the

old Central School (now site of the new Burke County Courthouse) in the early 1960s. Mrs. F.M. Carson, fifth from right, identified the class; standing at the rear is H.D. Moretz, dean and later acting president of the college.

Western Piedmont opened its doors the fall of 1966 after "the dream of securing a community college for Burke County had come true through the vision, dedication and relentless effort of many individuals," Cheryl Oxford wrote in "Opening the Door," a docu-drama of the college's founding.

Then the editor of The News Herald, the late Stanley Moore called approval of a local college "Burke's brightest day."

"The county commissioners have provided the sort of official leadership which has brought Burke County citizens the greatest opportunity of their generation," Moore wrote after the then seated Burke County Board of Commission set March 21, 1964 as election day for a bond referendum to support the college.

"Many fine things have happened to

Burke County, but a comprehensive community college can become one of the best," Moore wrote. "In light of the financial and educational bargain, the local share appears small. It is unthinkable that it can be regarded other than favorable."

Never in the history of the county had any election ever carried such support. The people supported the college in a 17-1 financial endorsement vote. It was an election called by Moore, "The most impressive showing of unity seen in this generation."

Phifer was named 1963 Man of Year by Morganton Rotary Club for his efforts in getting the college established and accepted his award saying "I accept it on behalf of the many who have worked so diligently — sometimes sacrificing their own primary interest — to bring this institution into our midst... also the solid bedrock

support from the great mass of people of this county."

Moore predicted the college a mark of a new era of progress for the county.

And "there is enough credit to be dispensed lavishly to all who had a part in this history-making project. Every organization which supported the movement can record in their permanent records that they had a part," Moore wrote.

Twenty years after the conception of the idea, a week of celebration is behind the many who labored over the affairs recognizing WPCC's 20th anniversary.

Now that the celebrations are over, let's stop and consider what we've celebrated — Burke County behind you are 20 years of opened doors walked through by many grateful WPCC students.



THE NEWS HERALD

Friday, April 13, 1984

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Publisher 1916-1959 Miss Beatrice Cobb

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Published by Park Newspapers of Morganton, Inc.; Roy H. Park, President
Samuel J. Ervin Jr., J.D. Fitz, Ben S. Whisnant, Directors