

Administrator: Job Worry Unfounded

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MORGANTON — When George M. Fouts accepted the vice presidency of academic affairs at Western Piedmont Community College in 1981, he feared losing that sense of immediate award that teaching often brings.

He felt an administrative position would not bring the satisfaction he experienced during eight years of teaching philosophy and English at WPCC and watching students' self-esteem grow.

However, after four years on the college's administrative staff — he was named executive vice president in 1984 — Fouts says his position offers a different view of that self-esteem.

He has found it can work for the community as well as the individual.

Fouts is in charge of WPCC's continuing education, curriculum programs, student services, the proposed new library facility, the East Burke Center, the senior citizens center, budgeting procedures, public information and long-range planning.

The reward of playing a direct role in the college's decision-making process is greater than he imagined, Fouts said.

"One of the greatest satisfactions that I have received as an administrator at this institution comes from being in a position to see what impact this



George M. Fouts, Right, Before Golf Tournament
Shown With Frank Bowers, Left, George Davis

Administrator Says Job Fears Unfounded

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college's educational programs have on the lives of the students in the community," Fouts said.

"I am in contact with a number of community organizations and businesses who are directly or indirectly involved in the employment of people who attend, or who have graduated, from WPCC," he said.

Fouts said he wants the college to be prepared to meet the need as area businesses and industries increasingly rely on employees with computer skills.

He said adequate training for employees is one way to ensure the ability of businesses and industries to manufacture quality products.

Having trained employees often means the employer is satisfied. Fouts said, which in turn means employees are satisfied. The end result is customer satisfaction, he added.

"The role an institution of higher learning plays in the socioeconomic environment is complex," Fouts said. "However, one of the key roles is helping the business community meet the need of technological advances through better-trained employees.

"Serving on the Burke County Chamber of Commerce's board of directors, I can see first hand the needs of area businesses and industries," he said.

"As an administrator here at WPCC, I am involved in working to help the college meet those needs — and there's a great deal of satisfaction involved in that."

Fouts received his master's degree in philosophy and English in 1973 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Later that year, he was hired by WPCC as a philosophy and English instructor in the humanities department. He also served as director of the college's writing program.

Fouts said he decided to make his home in Morganton, where he lives with his wife, Sharon, and two children, George Michael and Lenora.

The 33-year-old Davidson County native said his teaching career reached a high point in 1979, when he was chosen as one of 22 instructors from throughout the United States to work on a National Endowment project with the University of Iowa department of humanities.

After returning from Iowa in 1980, Fouts took the position of director of humanities and social services at WPCC.

He also had developed a lecture schedule, speaking at other colleges and to various community organizations.

He says his outlook on a career in humanities changed dramatically when he was asked by WPCC President James A. Richardson to become vice president of academic affairs.

Despite his devotion to teaching, and with coaxing from several members of the college board of trustees, he told Richardson he would take the job for one year.

"I did it with mixed feelings," said Fouts. "I feel it often is unusual to find people who really like their job — I liked teaching a great deal.

"However," he said, "I was told by Richardson and others at the college

that as an administrator I could bring things to the college that were needed. I decided I would try it for one year."

Before that first year ended, Fouts said he was ready to return to the classroom.

"I mentioned to Jim (Richardson) that he better start looking for someone about six months before my initial contract ended," Fouts recalls. "He shrugged it off several times and I finally sat down, typed up a letter of resignation and handed it to him."

Fouts said the college was experiencing change in 1982.

Community colleges across the state were concerned with the multifaceted job of promoting community college education, he said.

Fouts said he decided to stay with the college and see it through the period of change.

Although a return to teaching still appeals to Fouts, he says he has no desire to leave his current position.

"One of the major reasons I have stayed is realizing what part I can play in the opportunity that this college offers," Fouts said.

"I have met people in the community who attended WPCC and they told me they would not have had the opportunity to better themselves if not for the college.

"Seeing the kind of difference that such an opportunity has on the lives of people — the sense of accomplishment and the sense of self-worth that result from people taking advantage of such opportunity — brings a tremendous sense of satisfaction."