

Area hospitals finance WPCC nursing position

By KELLY WINTERS
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In the fight to combat the nationwide nursing shortage, three area hospitals have joined together to add a year-long nursing position to the roster at Western Piedmont Community College in Morganton.

The college's Western Piedmont Foundation Inc. announced Tuesday that to expand quality nursing services in the area, Grace, Valdese General and McDowell hospitals are funding a full-time nursing instructor position at the college.

Local hospital officials have been fighting the nursing shortage for more than a year. The nursing crisis, which is also gripping the rest of the nation, is

creating a tremendous demand for nursing graduates.

Gary Jennings, director of WPCC's Allied Health Division, said the new position will allow the college to instruct more students.

"The addition of this instructor to our staff is allowing us to admit five additional freshmen students this fall and a similar number over and above that five in following years," Jennings said. "An increase in enrollment obviously would lead to a larger pool of qualified nurses in the region."

The three hospitals have collectively donated \$25,000 to employ the one full-time nursing instructor for the 1988-89 fiscal year, with a further commitment of

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Position funded

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similar funding for up to two more years, for a total gift of \$75,000.

The college currently has 11 full-time and part-time nursing instructors, producing an average of 30 graduates per year.

Administrators at the three hospitals said they have a keen interest in seeing more graduates come from WPCC after a survey of nurses was done at each hospital.

Jack Taft, chief executive officer for Grace Hospital, said the survey showed that 45 percent of his nurses graduated from WPCC.

Valdese General President Bob Luse said over two thirds of his nurses received degrees from

WPCC, with Les Donahue, administrator of the McDowell hospital saying half of his nurses received degrees from WPCC.

This cooperative effort, the first of its kind at WPCC, was spearheaded by Taft.

"The idea originated during a conversation with (WPCC President) Jim Richardson," Taft said. "The college has received a federal grant that will help increase retention of nursing students. It doesn't, however, allow for increased enrollment in the program."

Taft said, "It's an important day because we have done two things: create a way for hospitals to work together and a way for our hospital to work within the community."