

Fireworks are fun for Larry Clark

By LEE BUCHANAN
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Whistling devils, silver rain, precious pearls and glittering chrysanthemums. No, that's not the latest Prince album; these are the names of some of the more spectacular fireworks which will set the night sky aglow over Western Piedmont Community College on July 4.

"I admit to being a child," says an unrepentant Larry Clark, at least where fireworks are concerned. Clark is one of the fortunate "adults" set to light fuses that will ignite a star-spangled celebration of the nation's birthday.

Clark, director of planning and development at WPCC, has been involved in the annual fireworks display since 1981, when he and Scott Oxford raised \$400 and staged a "less than spectacular" show.

The crowd that turned out that year — some 3,000 strong — "scared us to death," he recalls. "We thought about sneaking away because we know our fire-

Burke County Profiles



works weren't that grandiose."

But Clark stayed, and so did the crowd. Now, as the size of the audience grows — last year's show drew some 15,000 — and the fireworks become more sophisticated, the event has evolved into an "all-day carnival."

Now, the Fourth of July Committee — Clark, Joe Avery, Ed Redman, Roy Netherly and Carl Hennessee — is ready for its biggest show ever.

"We'll prepare anywhere from 250-300 (fireworks) this year and hope to have a budget of about

Continued on page 4C

Ahhs of the crowd Clark's reward

Continued from page 1C

\$3,000," he says.

"To hear 10,000 people say 'Ahh' is really something," says Clark. "To hear the children squeal is fantastic."

Clark says it takes half a day to prepare the display, and such a fireworks presentation requires federal, city and county approval.

Clark and his committee will soon embark on a fireworks shopping spree that would surely be the dream of any youngster. However, the cost of major league fireworks would outstrip even the most generous allowance — from \$6 for a three-inch shell to \$100 each for the giant eight-inch mortars.

Clark's sophisticated method for unleashing high-powered fireworks? "Light and run away," he says.

Turning to less-volatile concerns, Clark recalls how years of

studies in the humanities eventually landed him at WPCC as the first full-time faculty member when the college began its degree programs in 1966.

Clark, a Gastonia native, majored in social studies and biology at Appalachian State University, and for two years taught at High Point Central High School.

Later, after he earned a master's degree in history and anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a graduate school advisor recommended that Clark seek a position at fledgling WPCC.

The advisor told Clark that WPCC "was going to be probably the most innovative community college in the state," he remembers.

After 20 years at the Morganton college, Clark says he has found his college advisor's prediction to be accurate.

In 1968, Clark was named

chairman of WPCC's Social Studies department, and in 1981 became director of planning, a position which requires him to "wear four or five different hats."

Another of Clark's hats is that of archaeologist. In 1976 he authored "An Archaeological Survey of Burke County," and is still active in the N.C. Archaeological Society.

Clark still delights in visiting local schools and telling students of Indians who lived in the area 10,000 years ago.

He and his wife Patricia live on what Clark calls a "30-acre country gentleman's farm" north of Morganton, where they have raised goats and cows in addition to their three children.

The Clarks belong to First Presbyterian Church, where she is an elder and he is a former elder, deacon and Sunday school superintendent.



Spectacular fireworks light up Burke County skies with help of Larry Clark (inset).

Photo by Chuck Liddy