



Johnny and Abby Hildebrand are pictured with a map of the 414-acre forest area they are donating to Western Piedmont Community College. The

land, which is on the edge of the South Mountains, will be used as a learning resource area, according to WPCC officials. (Photo by Alan Marler)

Burke couple donates 414-acre forest to WPCC for learning area

By BILL POTEAT
Managing Editor

Western Piedmont Community College has been given a 414-acre tract of forest land on the edge of the South Mountains by Johnny and Abby Hildebrand to be used as an outdoor learning area.

The tract of land, called the Hildebrand Forest, has been deeded to the Western Piedmont Foundation and is located off Old Highway 18 about six miles southeast of the college campus.

The forest encompasses parts of Yellow Mountain and of Ironmonger Mountain. Iron ore which was used for armaments in the Revolutionary War was mined on Ironmonger Mountain.

Announcement of the couple's donation to the school came at a luncheon Wednesday which was held in the Phifer Learning Resource Center of WPCC and was attended by the Hildebrands and a number of college officials.

The land represents the largest single gift ever made to WPCC

during its nearly 30-year history, according to President Jim Richardson.

"We're simply thrilled that the Hildebrands are enthused enough about this college and what we're doing to make this kind of gift," said Richardson. "We couldn't be more pleased."

Both Johnny and Abby Hildebrand are natives of Burke County and their families have a long history of involvement in the county's educational system.

Johnny Hildebrand's father, George Hildebrand, served on the Burke County School Board for many years and was responsible for the consolidation of the 18 one-room schools in the George Hildebrand community into one school, which was later named for him.

Abby Hildebrand, who was born in the Bridgewater community, taught in the county's public schools for 39 years. From 1936 to 1966, she and her husband also operated the Jonas Ridge Community School during summer

months.

Morganton attorney Bob Byrd, who spoke briefly at the luncheon, praised both of the Hildebrands for their role in education and for their concern for Burke County children.

"This forest will serve not only as a monument to the Hildebrands, but also to all that they have believed in and worked for," said Byrd.

Asked after the luncheon what had led to the gift to the college, Abby Hildebrand said, "This is an opportunity for Burke County to preserve a very historic place."

Johnny Hildebrand called Western Piedmont "a fine school, a very fine school," and added that he and his wife had been considering making the gift for several years.

Richardson said the possible ways the college can use the 414-acre tract are "almost endless" and added that an advisory board

Couple donates forest

★ From page one

will probably be set up to determine appropriate uses.

"Certainly our biology and horticulture programs will be able to make good use of the area," he said. "We've even talked about setting up a pre-forestry program which could also use it."

Future plans for the area may involve construction of a lodge which could be used by the college staff for meetings and retreats and the development of a public hiking or fitness trail.

"The area is really beautiful," Richardson said. "It has a number of streams on it and some really pretty places. About the only problem is trees downed by Hurricane Hugo."