

Task force pleased with WPCC

By LETA PARKS
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Guiding the course of Western Piedmont Community College was the goal of a task force which has completed a comprehensive study of the college and how it can best meet the needs of the future.

The task force was made up of people from throughout the community who worked for eight months to put together "Visions of the Future: 2001."

In making the report they exam-



Lovelace

ined the college's present state and the future educational needs of the county.

"It's a long-range look at things," said Lou Lovelace, chairman of the task force. "You have to take the total picture and say these are the things we need to do for the college to be ready to enter the next century."

Lovelace was pleased with the picture he saw of the college's present state.

"I think that in general we found the college to be in good shape," he said. "It is serving the community well. We weren't really able to find a lot of things that we would say right now this needs to be changed."

The task force found needs the community will face in the future, so

the college can begin now to prepare for those needs.

An increased need for technical training is one of the things Burke County will face, said Lovelace.

"There will be a definite need for the community college to provide the technical training industry needs," he said.

Also, WPCC will need to help students from the community afford a four-year college education, even though it is a two-year school.

"With the rising cost of four-year schools, there will be an increased need for the two-year transfer program, because that's the only way a lot of the kids will be able to afford to go to college," Lovelace said.

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He praised the current state of the college, saying, "In just about every area we looked our community college is right at the top in the state of North Carolina."

"But maintaining that position will not be easy, he said. "It's tougher to stay number one than it is to become number one."

He also praised the college's trustees and administration for looking for ways to improve the school. "It's a tribute to the foresight of the board and the administration not to sit on their laurels, but to put together a task force like this," he said.

"That, in itself is a primary strength of the college," he said. "They're not content with the way things are now even though they're very good."

College president Jim Richardson sees more space for an expanding student body as the most important of the 33 recommendations the task force gave the school.

"We have grown so much in the past 10 years it's been unbelievable," he said. "We've got to be able to provide additional facilities for classrooms, laboratories and espe-

cially for student activities."

Space that was used before as places where students could entertain themselves between classes has been converted into classrooms, Richardson said.

And even with the new, Phifer Learning Resources Center, that is just a temporary measure, he said, adding the college still needs more classrooms.

But Morganton architect Robert Salsbury is already looking at a total campus facility plan which he will present to the school's trustees in the near future, Richardson said.

The plan will include future classrooms, laboratories, shop space and space for students, he said.

But along with this planning, the college will have to have money, the president said, when asked about the state budget crunch's possible effects.

"Without proper funds we continue to grow and if we do not get our enrollment growth funds we will definitely have to cut back on our services in all aspects," he said.

"If the money's not there, there's no way we can provide the educational training needed in our community," said Richardson, adding this

would have a negative effect on the economy.

Claude Sitton, chairman of the WPCC Trustees, was thankful for the hours of work the task force put into the study.

"I found that they had done a diligent job of investigation and had discussed each issue that was relevant to the future of the college," he said.

The trustees plan to consider the recommendations in the study and report back to the task force on action it has taken to implement the recommendations, Sitton said.

He contrasted the benefits of having local community members evaluate the college and make recommendations over having the same job done by outsiders.

"When you have a review by some committee from the outside, the committee comes in, reviews and makes suggestions and leaves," he said.

But with local people on the task force which studied the college, "We have them to stay around and continue to prod us," Sitton said.

Local volunteer involvement on the task force also saved the college money, he said.

The amount of money saved was, "probably \$100,000 for the value of the services they rendered," said the chairman of the Trustees.

The local involvement also helps to spread the word about the college's programs, Sitton said.

"Every person who was a member of the committee has left to stress the good qualities and the benefits the college offers," he said.

The working relationship between the college and the task force remained cooperative throughout the study, Lovelace said.

"They (college staff and officials) were very, very helpful with anything we needed, anything we wanted to see," Lovelace said. "Each subcommittee had a staff resource person from the college who would arrange anything they needed."

The college staff helped the committee members arrange for interviews with students and staff members, he said.

Some of the recommendations in the report were:

- WPCC faculty and staff should continue to monitor program quality and to define procedures for the introduction of new programs. The

process should include the availability of courses and programs within the region and the careful analysis of job market trends and projected future needs.

- WPCC should forge strong links between its remedial, diploma and degree programs. A goal should be established for the 1990's to increase the number of students moving from remedial education into advanced studies, the job market, and/or graduation.

- Student Services should develop a recruitment plan that targets mi-

norities, the academically disadvantaged, unemployed, and the financially needy. Regular meetings should be scheduled with these target groups.

- The College should expand its relationships with local employers and the Burke County Public Schools to consider Tech-Prep, 2 plus 2 in-plant literacy classes, and similar programs that encourage students and employees to continue their education and acquire those skills required in a 21st century workplace.