

WPCC would use bond money to address space needs

EDITOR'S NOTE: North Carolina voters will be asked Tuesday to approve a bond referendum with the state borrowing money to fund the University of North Carolina system; community colleges; water and sewer improvements; and state park improvements. Today The News Herald continues its series of stories on the bond package informing voters about this important issue.

By KEVIN ELLIS
News Herald Staff Writer

Approval of Tuesday's \$250 million bond issue for North Carolina's community

colleges would begin to address a serious problem of space needs at Western Piedmont Community College, said college President Jim Richardson.

"Our biggest problem on campus is space problems," Richardson said in a recent interview. "We're at the point that we can't add a new curriculum or expand a program because we're out of room."

If the bond issue passes, Western Pied-



Richardson

mont would receive \$3.4 million of the necessary \$4.2 million to build a business and technologies classroom building. It would be the college's responsibility to raise the remaining \$800,000 through local sources.

The \$250 million community college bond referendum represents 34 percent of a \$740 million state bond issue that also includes \$310 million for the state university system; \$145 million for water and sewer projects; and \$35 million for state parks. Each bond issue is a separate ballot question.

No organized opposition has surfaced to the community college bonds, although some individuals have voiced concern that the bonds might lead to tax increases.

State officials maintain the all of the \$740 million in bonds could be repaid with no increase in taxes due to the 20-year low in interest rates, a growing economy and the state's relatively low existing debt.

At Western Piedmont, a new business and technologies building would allow the college to expand its computer courses and offer more high-technology training to students.

The college considers both so necessary in the job market that in 1992 the college required every degree graduate to be computer literate.

Without the bonds, unless a separate local bond issue is approved, the community college could see its growth impeded,

Richardson said.

Citing a need for more room, in addition to the business and technologies building, the Western Piedmont Community College Board of Trustees recently voted to ask the Burke County Commission for a \$12 million bond referendum in the spring. If the state bond issue passes, the college would lower that request by \$3.4 million, Richardson said.

Currently, Western Piedmont ranks 53rd out of the 58 community college campuses in assignable square feet per student, Richardson said. Also, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools listed space

Continued from Page One

as one of the college's top needs.

If the community college bond referendum passes, the state would issue \$250 million for projects at each of the state's 58 community colleges.

This is the first statewide bond issue for construction at community colleges in their 30-year history. Counties historically have paid for most community college construction.

In fact, in the community college system's history, just \$95 million in state funds have been distributed to the 58 campuses for building needs, Richardson said.

In recent years, enrollment at community colleges has grown considerably. In the 1992-1993 academic year, the system's 58 colleges had 760,502 students, up nearly 100,000 in five years.

At Western Piedmont, enrollment increased by 36 percent in the 1980s. In the 1982-1983 academic year, 9,043 curriculum and continuing education students attended the college compared to 12,306 for the current year.

In Burke County, one out of every five adults have attended Western Piedmont Community College, Richardson said.

Western Piedmont has provided free training to workers at ITT Teves, the new state prison and Kimble Glass, to name just a few, Richardson said. 80 percent of the county's firefighters, law enforcement officers and persons in allied health services have received training at Western Piedmont.

Because of Western Piedmont's

Please turn to Page 14A involvement in the community, Richardson sees strong support locally.

"The fact that we've serviced so many and met so many needs should help," he said.

University bonds

If voters approve the university system bond issue the state would issue \$310 million for more than three dozen projects on the 16 campuses of the University of North Carolina system, at nine area health education centers, the North Carolina Arboretum, the UNC Center for Public Television and the N.C. School of Science and Mathematics.

About half the projects would involve renovations or expansions.

Supporters of the university bonds say that since 1989, only five new buildings have been financed on UNC campuses with state funds because of budget problems. All of those buildings were approved in 1992 and 1993, with no construction approved from 1989 to 1991.

At the same time, enrollment has grown by more than 16,000 students. Since 1989, the UNC Board of Governors has compiled capital needs for the system amounting to \$644 million.

Investments in the university system pay off by attracting out-of-state employers and research grants, supporters say.

No organized opposition has surfaced to the university bonds, although some individuals have voiced concern that the bonds might lead to tax increases.