

WPCC celebrates 30th anniversary

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Western Piedmont Community College marks its 30th anniversary just as it is getting ready to ask Burke County voters to approve a \$9 million bond referendum.

The bond vote marks only the second time WPCC has asked for money - the first being in 1964 when the college was getting its start.

Bob Carr has served on the board of trustees since the college began and is currently vice chairman of the board. He remembers working to pass a \$1 million bond 30 years ago and is working now to get this year's bond passed.

Part of the reason the college has grown is due to the first bond county voters passed, Carr said.

"All of us worked trying to persuade people to vote for it," he said.

College officials are saying the 1994 money is vital in helping WPCC prepare for the future and continue to offer opportunities for the citizens of Burke County.

"This is only the second time in 30 years the college has turned to Burke County citizens for construction funds," said Grady Pitts, dean of development at the college. "Passage of the bond is crucial to the community and the college."

He points to the rich history of

the college and how it is tied into the history of Burke County.

Anyone looking at the history of Burke will see WPCC as a pivotal development for the community, Pitts said.

"Western Piedmont opened the doors for thousands of people who didn't have an opportunity to further their education," Pitts said.

"Today with the community college system, the common man has the opportunity to pursue his or her aspirations as higher education is concerned."

Pitts has been at the college for the past several years. In that time he has seen tremendous growth in the needs of the community.

"A community college has to respond to a community's needs," Pitts said.

Therefore, programs are developed according to the growth and demands of the community, he said.

So in addition to such staple programs as law enforcement, nursing, and emergency medical technicians (a large majority of people in those field here in Burke County were trained at WPCC), the college has continually worked with area industry.

"In the last eight years, while still working with the two-year transfer program, WPCC has added a lot of programs related to industry," Pitts said.

More programs are likely to be developed as more businesses and industries move into the area, according to Richard Greene, dean of academic affairs at the college.

Greene said the county does not know what new businesses will be coming in years down the road so it is important for WPCC to have the flexibility to start new programs.

"A community college should be there to meet the needs of the community," he said.

Pitts credits Carr and other board of trustee members for laying the groundwork for continuous growth.

"Over the years, the trustees

have all been good leaders in the community," Pitts said.

With a long history and deep roots in the county, the early trustees and people associated with the college had a good feeling of what the county needed, Pitts said.

"We are stewards of that early and strong foundation," he continued.

Since its founding in 1964, WPCC has awarded more than 6,000 high school diplomas, more than 10,000 two-year degree diplomas, and more than 80,000 continuing education certificates.

With expansion plans already under way, officials are looking forward to the future at WPCC.

"WPCC started in the basement of city hall," Carr said. "Nobody anticipated the growth the college has had."

Working with a masterplan, the college broke ground on a new classroom building and have hired an architect to develop a new business and technology building.

If approved by voters, money from the referendum will go to construct three new buildings on the college's campus, the renovation of existing buildings on the campus, helping the college comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and installing state-of-the-art equipment in existing buildings.