

Industries show commitment to education

By RAE BEASLEY
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More and more local industries are placing emphasis on a good education and are helping their employees get marketable skills and improve their self-esteem all at the same time.

Valdese Weavers is a good example of commitment to education in the workplace.

Betty and Paul Herman, Valdese Weavers custodial employees, have spent most of this year studying to earn their GEDs.

"I really didn't have the opportunity to really study and finish school," said Betty, who dropped out of school in the ninth grade. "I thought it would be good to go ahead and achieve this, if nothing else."

Betty says she hopes to go to Western Piedmont Community College after earning her GED diploma and take classes in Industrial Quality Control — classes which will help improve her job status.

Paul, who also dropped out of school in the ninth grade, says he just wants to finish the classes necessary to earn his GED and then he'll decide about college.

Both say they study hard on the weekends to prepare for the twice-weekly class, sponsored by Western Piedmont, and are glad to come despite the fact they have to stay after their third-shift jobs to attend.

"Most young people don't realize that when they have the chance to get their education, they had better take it," Betty said. "They may want to do something more with their life later on."

WPCC pays for the books, the instructors and sets up the classes free of charge for employers who

want to give their employees a chance to earn their GED, improve certain job skills or need additional training.

Jackie Harrop and Vera Salter, both WPCC instructors, come to Valdese Weavers and help each of the eight students in the class.

"They are all on different levels and we help each one individually," Harrop said.

Burke Mills and Neuville Industries also allow students to either attend classes during their shift or after their shift, said Sylvia Milne, who works with the continuing education department at the college.

"These classes benefit the employees because there isn't as much lost time and materials," Milne said. "The employees perform better and begin to value education more. They pass it on to their children by reading to them and helping them with their homework."

Since 1984, the college has been in 25 industries.

"People feel comfortable with their work places," Milne said. "They don't have to leave work and go to school. Also, those that need job training can practice or be trained on the equipment their company currently owns. Some teachers follow their students around the workplace and determine what types of skills the students need to know."

The college helps fund the program through state grants and college officials say it is one of the most successful and productive programs around.

Last year, 287 students participated in the workplace classes.

In addition to the workplace programs, Western Piedmont Commu-

nity College has been making strides in helping immigrants who have settled in Burke County learn the English language.

WPCC offers "English as a Second Language" classes free of charge for those who currently speak Laotian, Cambodian, Spanish, Guatemalan and Mexican, Milne said.

Last year, they helped 109 students learn to read, write and speak the English language — a hard task, as over half of the students do not read or write in any language.

ESL classes are offered every morning and evening at the Old Burke County Courthouse. Spanish classes are offered at the First Assembly of God, which also has a Spanish church and at the First and Second streets housing projects.

Cambodian classes are also offered at the Valdese First Baptist Church.

"Literacy means a lot more today," Milne said. "Things are much harder to read today, the workplace is more complicated and is requiring more skills that workers didn't used to have to have."

"Everybody learns differently with different styles and different ranges of comfort. Usually a person who makes the decision to attend the program sticks with it and follows through. I can respect that. It's not easy to go back to school. It takes a great deal of effort."

Anyone interested in the GED, workplace classes or ESL classes can call Milne at 438-6103.