

WPCC holds its graduation

By JOHN CALLAHAM
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The 457 graduates of Western Piedmont Community College for 1997 walked down the aisle at CoMMA on Friday as they began a new chapter in their lives.

Even so, the commencement speaker for the ceremony acknowledged most in the class and in the audience were not going to gain much new insight into life from his speech.

"Most graduation speakers, myself include, serve to remind graduates of things they already know," said Gordon Blank, the former president of WPCC from 1966 to 1978.

Blank also told the audience he knew that, "the most pleasant part of a commencement speech for the audience is when the speaker says those magical words, 'In conclusion ...' "

Blank, who has spent much of the past nine years sailing with his wife Joan, used his experiences on the water as a metaphor for his speech.

"We've been hit by lightening, run aground, gotten lost, been boarded and searched and had equipment fail at the worst possible time," he said.

These experiences helped Blank to expect the unexpected, and to "be flexible", something that anyone in life can learn from and use.

Another sailing metaphor Blank use was, "Keep it simple." He told the graduates of one sailor he knew who had only the simplest of instruments to guide him on his boat.

"High-tech equipment can fail," said Blank.

At the same time, Blank said people also need to know how to use modern tools in order to get ahead in a modern world.

Blank also has to plan his course on his boat in advance in order to get to where he wants to go, and people must also plan their course in advance to attain their goals.

Looking toward the future was what the founders of WPCC did when they created the college back in 1964, according to Blank.

"They were pathfinders," he

Please turn to Page 10

Continued from Page One

said.

The 1997 graduates of WPCC seem to be ready to move ahead with their goals and lives. An informal survey before they graduated discovered that 75 percent of the college transfer students in the class said they will continue their education within a year.

Also, 25 percent of the technical and vocational students said they will continue their education within a year. Forty-nine percent of the 1997 class is already employed in a field and 94 percent of the class said they were satisfied with the education they received at the college.

WPCC Board of Trustee member Claude Sitton said that he hoped the class of 1997 will contin-

ue to achieve and prosper after they graduate.

"Remember to work hard and to share what you have learned with others," he said.

In addition to honoring its new graduates, WPCC also honored some of its own Friday.

WPCC instructor Mary C. Safford was honored as the 1997 winner of the college's Excellence in Teaching Award during the ceremony.

Safford, who joined the college as an instructor of political science and history in 1989, has received degrees from Tulane University, Appalachian State University and the Georgetown University Law School.

Safford has been instrumental in a number of WPCC activities,

including the organizer of the school's Fall Speaker Program.

Larry McMahon, the President of the Western Piedmont Foundation, presented a plaque and a \$500 check to Safford on Friday.

Two alumni of WPCC were chosen as the college's Alumni of the Year award during the graduation ceremony.

Grace Heights administrator Deborah Cook, a 1978 graduate of the college with an associate's degree in nursing, was honored for her many accomplishments, including serving on the Burke County Senior Advisory Council and the Healthy Burke Aging Task Force.

Cook received her bachelor degree in nursing from Western Carolina University and her master's in nursing from UNC-Greensboro.

Also, Ann Queen Giles, a member of the WPCC class of 1972 with a associate's degree in Medical Assisting, was honored for her accomplishments. She is currently the coordinator for the Medical Assisting Program at WPCC.

She has served as president of the North Carolina Association of Medical Assisting Educators and the advisory committee for undergraduate and graduate program in allied health sciences at Western Carolina University.

She earned a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Gardner-Webb and a master's in health science from Western Carolina University.