

Continuing education vital part of WPCC's mission

The Continuing Education Division at Western Piedmont Community College is committed to providing Burke County citizens with opportunities for "life-long learning."

Part of this mission involves providing employee training for local business and industry on an "as needed" basis. College staff members are in constant contact with local business and industry leaders to develop training programs which meet immediate industry needs.

In the past few years, WPCC has provided training for hundreds of employees of various industries in Burke County including Caterpillar, Henredon, SAFT, Kimble Glass, Drexel Heritage, ITT, Burke Mills, Doblin, and others.

Without question, the key to successful industry training is the quality of the instructor. Quality instruction requires technical knowledge and expertise, an ability to communicate information in a pleasant, comfortable and effective manner, and a willingness to assist others in acquiring new skills or enhancing existing skills.

Over the years, WPCC has employed the services of a number of quality instructors on a part-time basis to conduct business and industry training programs. Martha Ellis, or "Marty" as she insists that her students call her, is among those outstanding part-time instructors who enjoy helping others grow personally and professionally in their field.

A resident of Marion, Ellis is currently a full-time faculty member

at Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory teaching courses in English and Psychology to students enrolled primarily in college transfer programs.

After earning bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Western Carolina University, Ellis was hired to teach at McDowell Technical Community College. While working for MTCC, she moved into an administrative position and enrolled in a doctoral program in Educational Administration at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. For her doctoral dissertation, Ellis wrote about the role played by community colleges in industrial and workforce training.

For the past eight years, Ellis has taught industry training programs on a part-time basis with WPCC's Continuing Education Division emphasizing the need for workers to continue to upgrade their skills and retrain as industry faces market and technological changes.

Primarily focusing on courses in supervision and employability skills, Ellis has conducted training sessions of various lengths for Burke Mills, SAFT, Doblin, Caterpillar, ITT, and O'Mara. Many of these courses were designed to prepare employees for positions in management.

One such program, called the "diamond" program, conducted at Henredon, provided managerial training to women employees seeking promotions with the company. These courses were tailored to meet the specific needs of the industries and their employees. One class was

even taught at midnight to accommodate third shift employees' schedules.

When asked why she devotes time from her otherwise full schedule to teach these classes, Ellis comments, "I love to work with people, and I always learn from each class I teach. These employees have such expertise in their field it is gratifying to me to be able to help them go one step further in their careers. I find that I never encounter the same situation twice, and my energy level increases as a result."

She also likes the scheduling flexibility of these classes and the fact that they allow her to utilize different skills than in her full-time position.

On Tuesday, October 13, Ellis began a 9-week supervisory training program for 10 employees at the Drexel Heritage Plant #43 in Hildebran. At an orientation session with employees participating in the training held last week, Plant Manager Rick Turnham stated, "At Drexel Heritage, we recognize that our lead employees keep the plant running smoothly, and we want to make sure our employees have the tools they need to keep up with changes in the industry, allowing Drexel to compete in a global market."

Arthur Gardin, Human Resources Manager at the Hildebran plant, said this training demonstrates the "appreciation that Drexel Heritage has for its employees' dedication to work and the needs of the company."

Employee participants indicated they were looking forward to the

training and believed it would facilitate plant wide communication, morale, and teamwork. Ellis quickly noted that the total number of years of experience represented by the participants' tenure with Drexel Heritage was over 160 years.

She told the group that she "was not there to teach them how to do their jobs because they had already proven they could and were doing

that." Instead, she looks forward to helping these employees advance in the company, and as a direct result, help the company advance.

Western Piedmont Community College is always interested in knowledgeable, professional individuals who have a desire to share their area of expertise with others to serve as part-time instructors.

Currently, the Division of Con-

tinuing Education is looking for skilled instructors to conduct business and industry training in the following areas: supervision, team building, communication, and statistical process control. If you or someone you know would be interested in teaching one or more of these programs on a part-time basis, please contact Jim Benton at 438-6102 or Nancy Rockett at 430-7135.