

Teachers focusing on leadership skills

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It was a day of challenges, as some climbed bravely to the top of Western Piedmont Community College's alpine tower while others learned that they also serve who stand and hold the ropes.

It was a day of being uplifted, as they heard about the key role which they play in our society and of the debt which they are owed for the service they give.

And, it was a day for learning, as they were briefed on the relationship between Western Piedmont and the public schools and about other programs offered by the college.

It was the first day of "Leadership Burke For Teachers," a new program co-sponsored by the public schools and the Burke County Chamber of Commerce.

The program aims to develop

the leadership skills of the 27 teachers who are participating and to give them an overview of what is happening in Burke County and how they fit into the equation.

As they began their day on the campus of Western Piedmont, Chamber of Commerce Board Chairman Rob Turner told them, "One of the most important partnerships that a community can build is the partnership between business and education."

Assistant School Superintendent David Burleson welcomed the educators in the morning and later spoke to them at length about the challenges and the responsibilities which go with the teaching profession.

"This is an opportunity to experience Burke County," Burleson told them. "Many times we don't know the resources that are at our fingertips. This is an opportunity

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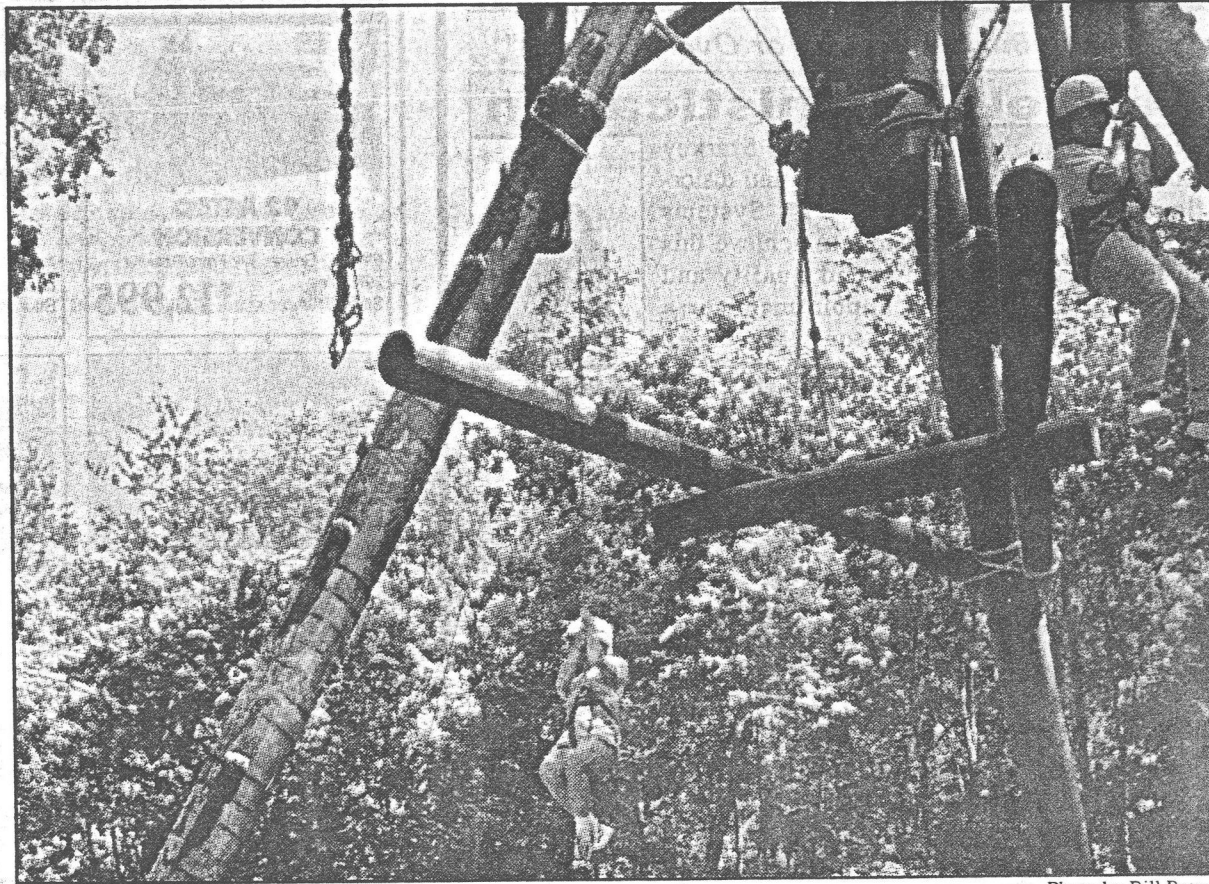


Photo by Bill Poteat

Teachers work their way to the top of the alpine tower at WPCC Monday.

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to see what our county has to offer and then to go back and share it with your students and with other teachers."

Before settling into the business of learning about the county, the teachers took some time to learn about themselves and their abilities to work together.

Western Piedmont staff member Cindy Konarski led the group through a series of team-building exercises designed to develop cooperation and trust among the teachers, many of whom had never met before.

The climax of that team-building effort was the climbing, by more than half of the teachers, of the alpine tower on the WPCC campus.

Some enjoyed scaling the 50-foot tower so much that they went up for a second time while others rested wearily on the ground, marveling that they had been able to make it to the top even once.

In the afternoon, the educators

listened to a more lengthy talk from Burleson, who praised them for their dedication and who urged them to continue to take seriously their "calling" as professional educators.

Bob Harbour, a facilitator of the event who is now head of Harbour Communications but who taught in the public schools for 26 years, urged the teachers to become more active in their communities.

"It's important that you vote," he said. "It's important that you pay attention to candidates and to issues. And, it's important that you be willing to devote time to professional organizations that represent you."

The first day of "Leadership Burke For Teachers" concluded with a series of speakers from Western Piedmont Community College.

Jean Sherrod spoke about the college's adult high school diploma program.

Vanessa Martin briefed the

teachers on the school's GED program and on the number and types of students it serves.

Maureen Schwind spoke about the Talent Search program, which identifies potential WPCC students while they are still in middle school and provides them with full scholarships to the institution.

Finally, WPCC Dean of Student Services Jim Burnett talked about the various degree programs and options which the college offers to Burke residents.

"We want you to let your students know that we are here and that we can help them," Burnett said. "We can't be everything to everybody, but we do have a lot to offer at a low cost."

Today, the "Leadership Burke For Teachers" participants will hear from a variety of speakers about economic development prospects in Burke County and also from a number of local government leaders.