

Kiwi praises WPCC

3-10-02 NH

New Zealander has nothing but high praise for our community college

By SHARON McBRAYER
The News Herald

MORGANTON — It's not often that Burke County has visitors from half a world away, but for the last month Burke has been home to a visiting college president from New Zealand.

Dr. Jack R. MacDonald, chief executive (president) of Manukau Institute of Technology, arrived in Burke County about a month ago and set up office at Western Piedmont Community College to learn about the community college system in North Carolina.

His visit has been part of the Post-secondary International Network, which is made up of

community colleges and poly-technical institutions from around the world. The idea of visiting the various colleges in the network is to exchange ideas and views and, hopefully, take away things that work best.

After meeting people, asking questions and talking to students, faculty and staff, MacDonald had nothing but high praise for the community college.

"I think it's important for the residents of Burke County to understand what a fine institution Western Piedmont is and what it offers to the community," he said.

The college has high-quality programs that are taught by very talented and committed faculty, MacDonald said.

Leaning back in a chair in his temporary office at the college, MacDonald said he believes Western Piedmont is not only wonderful for people wanting a technical degree but is a great steppingstone for students

wanting to attend a four-year university.

"If I were a high school student getting ready to graduate, I would very seriously consider spending a year or two at a place like this," he said.

MacDonald believes the college serves the students but also should be a part of solving problems that face the community, such as the recent economic downturn and trying to bring in new business to the area.

"In moving the county out of this difficulty, education must play a dominant role," MacDonald said. "The ability will, undoubtedly, depend on the education of citizens of Burke County."

MacDonald said he finds it strange that the college is not asked to be more involved with problem-solving by the city and county.

He said he is called upon in New Zealand to serve on every

See MacDonald / page 11A



Visiting chief executive of Manukau Institute of Technology Dr. Jack R. MacDonald in his temporary office at Western Piedmont Community College in Hildebrand Hall Tuesday. By Bridgett Baker

MacDonald

Continued from Page One

policy-setting committee — economic, unemployment, education and health committee — and either he or his staff participate freely.

"I don't see that as much here," he said. "This is a resource and the community should take advantage of it."

Though he has enjoyed his time here and has enjoyed the area, he said the thing he finds foreign is how many of the committees within the county are politicized.

However, one similarity Burke County shares with Manukau City, where MacDonald lives, is the dropout rate of high school students.

"That's a disease that must be cured or the economic situation in the county will just continue," he said. "That's something that needs to be worked on by everyone in the county and this institution must be part of that."

After observing faculty, staff and students, MacDonald said he has come to see that Western Piedmont is an excellent institution even by interna-

tional standards.

And MacDonald should know. He has an extensive background in university and college settings in the United States, Canada and New Zealand as student, teacher and now president.

MacDonald, who has 35 years in education, did a post-doctoral fellowship at Oxford University and spent 21 years teaching in Canada at the University of Guelph. He also was a visiting professor of electrical engineering at Stanford University in California for 18 months and became chief executive of Manukau Institute in 1996.

He stressed again how important the relationship is between the college and the community. MacDonald said people can either look to Western Piedmont as a state institution or as a part of the greater community that works together for the good of the area.

MacDonald's last day at Western Piedmont was Friday. He and his wife planned to do some sightseeing before heading out for a 9,000-mile journey home.