

# WCC BREAKS GROUND FOR NEW SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY BUILDING

By Sandy Sheets

Wilkes Community College officials, as it celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, welcomed guests to the campus on Tuesday, March 22, for a groundbreaking ceremony officially beginning the construction of a new science and technology center. Guests and college personnel gathered at the Robin Joines Plaza were welcomed by Dr. Gordon Burns, president of the college. An invocation was delivered by Luther Parks, a member of the WCC Endowment Corporation.

Susan Whittington, chair of the WCC Board of Trustees, addressed the audiences with remarks, and Pam Casstevens, president of the WCC Student Government Association (SGA), spoke on behalf of the student body.

Those breaking ground with ceremonial shovels included Susan Whittington, chairman of the WCC Board of Trustees; Bob Miller, chairman of the WCC Endowment Corporation; Ray Triplett, chairman of the building and grounds committee of the WCC Board of Trustees; Dr. Gordon Burns, WCC president; Jeff Hatley, WCC faculty senate chairman; Wesley Poplin, WCC staff council chairman; and Pam Casstevens, WCC SGA president.

The new science and technology center is the primary component of Phase One of Wilkes Community College's "The Next Step" capital campaign. The project is the result of an extensive needs assessment conducted by a Wilkes Community College task force composed of instructors, staff, administrators, and trustees after passage of the 2000 Higher Education bond referendum. Wilkes Community College received \$2.86 million in new construction money for the Wilkes campus from the bond referendum.

The study led to creation of a master facilities plan for the 150-acre Wilkes campus and identified approximately 60,000 square feet of immediately needed space. "The study clearly identified technology and modernization of the science labs as our number one priority," said Dr. Gordon Burns, WCC president. "In addition to science and technology, there were two other criteria that we asked the architect to address in locating and designing the facility. Placement of the building to serve as a connector between the upper and lower campuses and the showcasing of the James Larkin Pearson collection in a contemporary setting were the other two. This plan addresses these priorities in a creative and highly functional way," said Burns.

The science and technology center will include new science labs to replace existing 38-year-old facilities. In addition, state-of-the-art computer labs, cyber classrooms, and technologically equipped classrooms will allow traditional students access to the best educational opportunities in northwestern North Carolina and also reach the distance learner. The building will also house the James Larkin Pearson Library and collection and includes a large, dividable lecture hall.

The focal point of the four-story 33,000 square foot center will be the second (main) floor atrium, which will showcase the Pearson collection in a contemporary, mall-like setting. The open area will be a gathering spot for student activity, classes in the cyber classrooms, and computer labs. The college's information technology staff will also be housed on this level. The use of glass on the east side of the building will allow for a panoramic view of the campus.

Overhead, a roof with clerestory windows will allow natural light to permeate the open interior of the building. New chemistry, biology, physics, and additional computer labs will be located on the third floor. The science faculty will also occupy space on this floor.

Students and others can enter the first floor elevator lobby, exit at any level, or go to the fourth floor and exit via a pedestrian walkway to Randolph Hall, Daniel Hall, and the Walker Center on the upper campus. On the lower campus, the building will be accessible to all from three ground floor entries.

The new science and technology center is scheduled to take 485 days to complete, with occupation in fall 2006. The total estimated cost is \$6.4 million. The architect for the project is Bruce B. Cantrell, with the architectural firm of J. Hyatt

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