

General Assembly Addresses Issues

by Susan Marschalk

WCU Gets Funds for Activities Center

Another outcome of the state legislative session this spring was the University of North Carolina Board of Governors' appropriation of \$16 million to Western Carolina University to build a regional activities center.

The figure allotted for the center represents more than a third of the total amount of capital improvements funding available to state universities.

Other universities who received a share of the \$45 million total were N.C. State, UNC-Chapel Hill, East Carolina and N.C. Central.

UNC-A requested slices of the state funding pie for "two major things," according to university chancellor William E. Highsmith: (1) advance planning money for the renovation of Lipinsky Student Center, and (2) a request for \$3.75 million to build a new science building. Highsmith said he had not expected to get either "in the first round." He didn't.

"As it stands, we're pretty empty-handed," he said. But there is always this fall.

"We'll fight some of these things out," Highsmith said, referring to the reconvening of the General Assembly for the fall session in October.

WCU's new regional activities center has been billed by WCU officials and some area politicians as a center for the general public as well as for university students. It has been in the planning stages since April 1979, according to WCU chancellor H. F. Robinson.

The center would see "constant use," Robinson said in a telephone interview.

"We've jammed 4-5,000 people in Reid gym," he said. The gym has a capacity seating of 3,200.

The proposed center would be a place to hold basketball games and rock concerts, among other crowd-attracting activities, Robinson said. The facility would also house an ice skating rink, indoor tennis courts, rifle rings, handball courts and other sports features.

Robinson said he thought the center, with a maximum seating capacity of 8,500, would be filled for concerts and games, but gave no definite answer as to how much day-to-day use the facility might afford non-university students. The location of the center on the Cullowhee campus, which is near no heavily populated area, has caused some concern on the part of Western Carolina residents.

"People can't get to Asheville," Robinson

said. "We have 56 miles of four-lane highway."

Robinson said that Asheville has a civic center and that the people of Haywood County and surrounding regions need a facility to serve their needs.

In addition to Reid gym, WCU also has an auditorium that seats 720 people and the recently-built Whitmire stadium, which seats 12,000.

Chancellor Highsmith said "it would not be proper" for him to comment on the WCU funding and also refused to comment on whether he supported funding of such centers through the educational system.

"All money spent for the university should be spent for the general public good," he said.

UNC-A enrolls approximately 2 percent of the state universities' students, while WCU enrolls about 7 percent. Over the past seven years, Robinson estimated that WCU has received \$25 to \$30 million in state capital improvements funds. Highsmith estimated that figure for UNC-A at \$8 million.

Construction of the WCU regional activities center should begin in 1982-83 and be completed in time for the 1984 basketball season, according to media reports.

Horse Show Facility Planned

A little more than a year ago, Western North Carolina horse fans decided state and local governments ought to shell out about \$500,000 for a horse show facility here. They set out to persuade legislators.

Last July, the group walked away from the North Carolina General Assembly in Raleigh with \$1.65 million for their trouble.

Reaction to the General Assembly's decision to appropriate \$4.1 million to building horse show rings, one here and one in Raleigh, has been mixed, say legislators, state officials and horse association officers alike.

But happy with the appropriation or not, more than anything else, everyone was surprised.

None of the State legislators spoken to knew where the appropriations figure had come from, particularly the \$1,650,000 designated for the western show ring, though Rep. Marie Colton, D-Asheville, did say that approximately \$5 million had been suggested for state office buildings in Fayetteville and Asheville before state legislators started feuding over where to put the Asheville branch. When an agreement could not be reached, the horse show rings were substituted.

"It was just a figure someone thought would be nice," Sen. Marshall Rauch, D-Gaston, said of the \$1.65 million designated for the western facility, to be located in Henderson County near Asheville Regional Airport on land given to the state by the City of Asheville.

Rauch was on the Advisory Budget Commission that presented its proposed budget to the Appropriations Committee, he said, and an appropriation for an Asheville area facility was

"never even considered or asked for." For Raleigh, he said, an allocation of \$3.5 million was considered and turned down, with a substitute figure of \$150,000 proposed for study and planning.

Rauch said the Asheville arena was first considered two or three days before the budget was adopted.

"It was included at 10 minutes after eight on that Monday night...and was passed and voted on before nine o'clock," Rauch said.

Rep. Charles H. Hughes, R-Hendersonville, said he "had no idea until the bill was introduced "that such a facility was being considered." Representative Hughes was referring to a special provision made for the facilities in the capital improvements appropriation bill. "There had been no discussion with adjoining districts," he said.

Hughes said it sometimes happens with state legislators that "you are not always informed of things in your area," but said that he thought legislators had ample time to discuss the bill in session.

Representative Colton, a supporter, said of the Asheville horse show ring, "There was never a major effort to get it at any particular time...We were all aware it would come up at some time...why this year, I can't tell you."

She said the local delegation to the state legislature was not involved in the decision to include the horse show structures in this year's budget, though local representatives voted on the whole appropriations package.

Senator Rauch was one of the few Democrats who did not support the allotment of funds for

horse show rings. He called the appropriation "pork-barrel legislation of the finest caliber," and said he did not believe the facilities will pay for themselves.

"It is not the business of government to get into the horse business," he said. "The government's business is the health, education and welfare of its citizens. If a horse arena, why not a wrestling arena?"

He said Raleigh already had a facility -- the arena at the state fairgrounds, which is used for 41 different horse shows.

Hughes said he did not believe the facility would pay for itself within a few years, as supporters claim. "We're making a mistake," he said. "...I don't think just because you have money and tax revenues that you should spend them," he said.

Black Mountain's Johnny Fore, show chairman and former president of the Racking Horse Breeders Association, doesn't think so.

"We could be another Gatlinburg here in Black Mountain," he said. "Western North Carolina needs something here to do. People come into my restaurant (Burger Hutt of Black Mountain) and ask what there is to do. I tell them Biltmore House and Gardens. They go see that and come back asking, 'What else?' After two or three days, there's nothing to entertain them."

Fore said the new facility will attract people from all over the Southeast. A horse show scheduled for Aug. 29 saw "all the motels in Black Mountain rented and some on the roadway," according to Fore.

So what's wrong with present show accommodations?