

Development Office

By Christie S. Hutchens

To put it simply, the staff in the Development Office are fundraisers and *friend* raisers for WCC. Committed to the mission of WCC and proud to be able to contribute to the success of the college, the staff contributes time, talent, and hard work to enhance the lives of our students, faculty, staff, and community members.

The largest fundraising effort for WCC, MerleFest, contributes an average of \$577,000 to the college annually. Since its humble beginnings in 1988, MerleFest has grown substantially and continually brings visitors and dollars to WCC. Originally the purpose of MerleFest was to raise funds for the Doc and Merle Watson Garden for the Senses. Since the garden's completion in 1997, MerleFest contributes to many areas of need at WCC. Scholarships, equipment, faculty and staff development, construction and renovation are just a few examples.

MerleFest is not the only fundraising event coordinated by the Development Office staff. In October of each year, college supporters and golf fans gather at Oakwoods Country Club for the Henry Moore Golf Classic. This 22-year-old event has become a significant fundraiser and one of the premier golf tournaments in the region. Development Office staff plan and manage special event fundraisers such as the New Year's Eve Celebration and WCC Endowment Gala. The Development Office also partners with the NFL Alumni/Shriners Charity Golf Classic, and Swing for Charity. Through this partnership, WCC receives sizable donations from each event in exchange for assistance in planning the events. The Henry Moore Golf Classic, New Year's Eve Celebration, NFL Alumni/Shriners Golf Classic and Swing for Charity bring an average total of \$230,000 to WCC each year. The staff continually evaluates new ideas for events that will raise funds and increase community involvement with our college.

You may wonder who decides where the funds go and how the Development Office should go about raising funds. The Development Office staff must work closely with both the Endowment Board and the Administrative Council to define goals and strategize on how to reach those goals. The Administrative Council identifies the college's needs and goals in a long range plan and communicates the top priorities to the Development Office. Once the goals are prioritized, the Development Office sets out to secure funds to make those goals a reality. The Endowment Board is comprised of local community members who assist the Development Office staff in deciding the best methods to raise funds and implementing these ideas. These community members volunteer their time and talents to steer the direction of the Development Office campaigns and they contribute to events by recruiting participants and helping with behind the scenes work.

Presently, funding the construction of the new Science and Technology building is the primary goal outlined by the Administrative Council. Currently 91% of the \$8.4 million goal has been met. When the goal has been met and the building completed, it will be time for the Administrative Council to determine a new goal for the Development Office's fundraising efforts. The Development Office relies on two main strategies to raise funds, events and direct solicitations. Many individuals and businesses have made generous donations to WCC and our county and town governments have also assisted when possible. The Development Office staff works to cultivate relationships with individuals, businesses, and government to benefit WCC and our community.

Donors to WCC are not always contributing money, many contribute time as well. The Development Office serves the needs of WCC by providing volunteer support year round in areas such as tutoring, the library, grounds and events. In 2004, volunteers donated 53,565 hours to WCC.

The Development Office ensures that the public is aware of all the happenings at WCC by sharing news with local media, groups and individuals whenever possible. Educating the public of the vital role WCC plays in the community is always on the minds of the Development staff. Through marketing and public information efforts, the staff position WCC as the hub of educational and cultural activity in Wilkes and surrounding counties.

The events held at the Walker Center, including the Walker Center Season Shows, Add-On Shows, and School Events, are managed by the Development Office staff. These events are one way WCC improves quality of life with cultural activities. Program and brochure design, talent booking, volunteer recruitment, and overall event coordination fall under the responsibility of Development Office staff members. Staff members are always present at these events to ensure that everything goes well and guests to our campus are pleased with their experience.

The Development Office raises funds, increases community involvement and awareness, and contributes to the overall success of the college. The staff know the value of their efforts every time a new building goes up, a classroom receives much needed equipment, or a community member comments on the successes going on at Wilkes Community College.

