

First graduation

Everyone, whether they reside in Sussex County or elsewhere, who has contributed to the success of the Wirths Campus of Upsala College in Wantage has ample reason to celebrate this Thursday.

That's the day the college will hold its first commencement exercises in the county, with 23 graduates slated to receive associate degrees during ceremonies in the recently constructed ballroom of Wantage House.

The Wirths Campus, located on 271 acres donated by Wallace Wirths, opened in 1979 as an extension of Upsala's main campus in East Orange. The campus serves as the first full-time higher education facility in the county.

Wirths, a philanthropist, has to be the person most responsible for this occasion. His gift of the property was the pivotal move in bringing Upsala College to Sussex County. The commencement wouldn't be taking place if it weren't for Wirths' generous present, which, he stipulated, was to be used for educational purposes.

After Wirths, the list of people who helped toward the development of the Wantage Campus is a long one. Credit for the satellite center has to go to Dr. Rodney Felder, who as president of Upsala College provided the guidance to turn Wirths' gift into an educational facility. The initial graduation has to be a proud moment for him.

The man behind the scenes who handled the preparation for classes in the county, Dean Edward Lawson, has served as director of

the school's Wirths Campus. His expertise in solving logistics problems have meant a lot to the fledgling program. The exercises have to be something special for him.

In addition to the Wantage location, classes have been held at various sites throughout the county. Since the first classes in 1979, enrolled has increased, with about 250 students attending this school year. College officials are optimistic about the future.

They hope that by the end of the decade about 900 students will be enrolled at the campus. They also hope to consolidate all classrooms at the Wirths Campus as a result of an ambitious building program, which includes two new structures with 24 classrooms and laboratories. This construction, a library and an administration building will cost about \$2.6 million.

The college couldn't have picked a more appropriate speaker for its initial commencement. State Sen. Wayne Dumont will deliver the keynote address. Dumont, dean of the Senate, is known for his views toward education and is regarded throughout the state by educators as one of their staunchest allies in the Legislature.

There will be other graduations at the Wirths Campus. However, none of them will probably have the significance of this first one, whether you are a member of the graduating class, a person who has served on the college's advisory council, Wirths, Dr. Felder, Lawson, Dumont or anyone who helped make the initial commencement a reality.