Debra Hurt of Chestertown, Md., moved into Davis Dormitory yesterday

An uninterviewed woman is hard to find at W&L

By Gail Nardi
Times-Dispatch state staff

LEXINGTON — "I'm looking for an uninterviewed girl," Jim Kerr explained as he ushered a wire service reporter down a dormitory hallway yesterday at Washington and Lee University.

By midafternoon, many of the 196 young women who make up about one-fourth of W&L's first co-educational undergraduate class had lost their uninterviewed status.

Kerr, president of W&L's undergraduate alumni group, found his quarry among a group of freshmen watching a classmate re-enact the unpacking of her Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt for a camera crew from a Roanoke television station.

Kerr was one of the "student guides" assigned by W&L's news office to shepherd reporters and photographers from 14 news organizations around campus yesterday.

Such media attention would be astonishing, W&L President John D. Wilson told about 220 parents assembled in Lee Chapel yesterday afternoon, "unless the rumor is true that I heard this morning that Brooke Shields has transferred and is out there somewhere in the campus."

But considering that the decision of W&L's board of trustees on Bastille Day — July 14 — 1984 to admit women undergraduates to one of the nation's few remaining all-male colleges made news as far away as London and Paris, Dr. Wilson said, all the fuss wasn't too surprising.

"If you don't wish to comment on the historical significance of your 17-year-old going off to college, you don't have to," Dr. Wilson told the laughing parents.

One of the most-interviewed of the women students wasn't a freshman, but a senior transfer student from Hallins, Kathleen Plante of Great Falls.

If she chooses to graduate with her class next summer, Miss Plante would become the first woman to receive an undergraduate degree from W&L. That possibility has made her a celebrity among her male classmates, some of whom would like to make history another way as the last all-male graduating class.

"If I did graduate, I'd be the only woman in my senior class, and I don't know, to tell you the truth, if I'm interested in that. It would be historic and it would be controversial," Miss Plante said yesterday.

With a practiced diplomacy that reflected "dozens and dozens" of interviews, she said that the stay at W&L for an extra semester to take East Asian Studies classes she wasn't able to fit in during three previous semesters as an exchange student.

As the temperature climbed into the 60s again with a humidity level to match, wilted-looking parents toted their sons and daughters' belongings across the brick quadrangle in front of Gresham-Lee Dormitory, while photographers took pictures of other photographers taking pictures of a Lynchingburg television crew interviewing freshmen women.

Inside, in most of the men's dormitory rooms the desks were standard freshman fare: chocolate brown quilts on the beds, sports posters on the walls and stress already blazing from planked bookshelves.

Upholstered on the men's floors, the ubiquitous metal beds were hardly recognizable, draped as they were in color-coordinated designer sheets and comforters.

"My mother went a little overboard," said Ailton Parker, a freshman from Baltimore, as she showed a vantage point, where a pink plush pig presided over pink flowered sheets, a pink and white director's chair, and a pink and green rug featuring more chubby, pink parkas.

Back outside, looking cool in brightly colored Jams, the unique uniform of the day. Student Body President John Lewis of Greenville was giving interviews and noting trends.

"C-Hauds were something that came in this year. The men always brought their stuff in the back of the car," said Lewis, a dorm counselor. "And the fathers are definitely working.