



STEVENS REPLACES ROSE AS MAYOR IN YEAR OF CHANGE

VOTERS CHOSE REPLACEMENTS in November for the Wilson City Council's two longest-serving members.

First, the board lost A.P. Coleman, who resigned in May 2019 for health reasons. Councilman Coleman was first elected in 1975, only the second African-American to be elected to the City Council, and had served nearly continuously for 38 years.

The City Council agreed to hold the seat open until November, when voters chose Gillettia Morgan as the new District 1 council member. It was her first run for elected office, but she has been involved with several city boards.

That election also saw a change in the mayorship for the first time in nearly three decades. Mayor C. Bruce Rose had held the city's top office since July 1992 and had overseen many improvements, including the construction of Buckhorn Reservoir and the establishment of Greenlight, North Carolina's first fiber-to-the-home network.

But Carlton Stevens, who operates a local funeral home, ran a spirited campaign with a commitment to "One Wilson" and narrowly won election as the city's first African-American mayor. The new and returning City Council members took their oath of office in December 2019.



PROJECTS TRANSFORMING FACE OF DOWNTOWN WILSON

A DOWNTOWN YMCA, a new hotel in a historic property, new residential and commercial spaces are all redefining the area known as Historic Downtown Wilson. In early 2019, BB&T (now Truist Financial after a merger with SunTrust) broke ground for its 95,000-square-foot office facility on Pine Street. The new \$35 million building will open in 2020 and house around 650 bank associates, many of whom work in the iconic but outdated twin towers at 223 West Nash Street.

BB&T had announced in fall 2018 that it planned to demolish the towers following the new building's opening. Many people were curious what would happen with the location.

Those questions began to be answered in October when the city announced what will be the largest economic development project ever for downtown Wilson.

The heart of that project will be a new facility that will be the shared home of an afterschool network for middle school youth and the Wilson Family YMCA. The project includes \$22 million in funding from the Healthcare Foundation of Wilson that was announced first in fall 2018.

"The YMCA is fortunate to be relocating to a shared home with the afterschool network - it's a true win-win with a brighter future for our youth and YMCA members," said Kathie Davis, executive director of the Wilson Family YMCA.

The city also plans to work with partners to create a large-scale residential/retail mixed-use development fronting Pine and Nash streets. More details are expected to be announced in 2020.

In December, the City Council approved an agreement to redevelop the Cherry Hotel on Nash Street, next to the train depot. A business group, Cherry Hotel, LLC, will invest \$19.9 million in private investment to renovate the hotel. Once complete in mid-2021, the Cherry Hotel will include 100 guest rooms supported by a reception area, bar, dining, two-story ballroom and conference space.

"It would be hard to overstate the impact this hotel will have on our downtown turnaround," said Wilson City Manager Grant Goings. "Wilson has achieved this milestone not due to luck, rather, three long years of hard work, perseverance, and dedication by all parties involved. We hope the community will take great pride in seeing this wonderful building transformed from the verge of demolition to a showpiece that honors our past and celebrates our bright future."

Also downtown, Whirligig Station opened for residents in July.

Waukeshaw Development of Petersburg, Va., had been working for years on a project to convert a century-old, 64,000-square-foot brick warehouse into a mix of market-rate apartments, commercial spaces and a visitors' center for the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park. The first residents were able to move in the summer, bringing even more residents downtown.

WILSON OPENS FIRST DOG PARK, CONTINUES OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

RESIDENTS HAD ASKED CITY OFFICIALS

for years for a park they could share with their canine friends. The city's first dog park opened in late October at the corner of Ward Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue.

"This is a place for fellowship," Mayor Bruce Rose said during the opening. "This is a place to spend time with your best friends, a place to relax and play."

The 4-acre site had previously been apartments that were flooded during past hurricanes. The land was donated to the city. Recreation Director David Lee and members of the Recreation Advisory Commission traveled to various dog parks to see what worked elsewhere. The final park includes two fenced-in areas, one for dogs less than 22 pounds and the other for larger dogs; shade facilities, benches and obstacles for pups to explore.

The year also included the dedication of Greater Wilson Rotary Park (formerly Cavalier Terrace) in April. The massive overhaul of the park added pickleball courts, a modern playground, newly constructed and better draining multipurpose fields, and a half-mile track.

Lake Wilson Park had exploded in popularity in 2018 with the opening of a pedestrian bridge across the lake that created a 2-mile-plus loop.

In March 2019, the City Council voted to approve major improvements at the Lake Wilson park, including a bathroom facility, improved boat ramp and new boat docks, sidewalks near parking areas, paved parking, and landscaping enhancements. Also included is a new pedestrian bridge over the dam. That work began in fall 2019; the park is expected to fully reopen in spring 2020.



VOLLIS SIMPSON WHIRLIGIG PARK WINS STATE, NATIONAL AWARDS

THE VOLLIS SIMPSON WHIRLIGIG PARK

celebrated its second year by gaining state and even national attention.

The park was chosen as the 2019 Great Places in America "People's Choice" by the American Planning Association, winning an online competition against parks in much larger cities. The award was announced in October and celebrated during the 2019 N.C. Whirligig Festival.

"We are honored to win the APA's Great Places People's Choice Award," said Jeff Bell, Whirligig Park Director. "We are grateful to be recognized for our work. The Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park truly is a great place, one that is loved locally and known nationally for its cultural and economic impact on our community."

The North Carolina Chapter of APA also chose the park as a Great Place for Public Art.

It was a banner year for the park, which opened in November 2017 and preserves the works of the late Vollis Simpson, a renowned local folk artist.

The park hosted many events including outdoor family movie series in the spring and fall; the Downtown Beats & Eats series that showcases local and regional musicians; the Historic Downtown Wilson Farmers & Artisans Market twice a week in the summer and fall; and the N.C. Whirligig Festival in November.

The park was also a draw for the Tarheel Shorties film festival, which relocated to Wilson from Wilmington in 2019 and will return in 2020.

RENOVATIONS BEGIN FOR GIG EAST EXCHANGE

CONSTRUCTION BEGAN in late 2019 on the Gig East Exchange, Wilson's new home for entrepreneurs and innovators. The Exchange, located at 127 Goldsboro Street, will open in mid-2020 as a unique co-working space to encourage start-ups, foster entrepreneurship and serve as the home base for Meet Ups and related programs. The Exchange is made possible by a grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation and matched funds from the city.

In late 2019, RIoT, the largest Internet of things (IoT) economic development organization in the United States, announced it is bringing its successful RIoT Accelerator Program to Wilson through its partnership with Gig East.

RAP is a 12-week guided program for early stage startups, which is intended to give these new businesses a greater chance of success by connecting them to a network of more than 75 companies representing a variety of technology resources and services. RAP participants will attend weekly workshops and mentoring sessions, as well as regularly work together with the program director through market validation, product development, go to market and growth strategies.

Gig East hosted several information sessions to find the first cohort of new companies and entrepreneurs in Wilson, eastern North Carolina and the Triangle area. This group will begin the program in early 2020 and participate in the Gig East Summit 2020 in May.

For the latest news and updates on the Exchange, visit www.gigeast.com or join our Meet Up group **Gig East Wilson**.

TIGER PROJECT NEARS END; NEXT STEPS BEGIN

THE U.S. 301 CORRIDOR has been under constant construction since spring 2018, but city officials are already anticipating what will come next. The U.S. 301 TIGER grant project is a nearly \$18 million project that is using a mix of federal, state and local money to improve a 2-mile stretch of the road for both vehicular and pedestrian safety. The groundbreaking was in April 2018. The work was 95 percent complete by early 2020 and will be completed by 2022.

Planners began working in 2019 to develop a community vision for the newly remade highway. The city is doing an economic development study to determine what residents want and need in the area.

This effort began in August with a community workshop held at Reid Street Community Center and hosted by Wilson Community Improvement Association. While kids were entertained with music, food, games and face painting, adults were able to

share their ideas for businesses and other amenities they want in the area.

There will be more opportunities for public input in 2020, all of which will be used to develop the plan and specific strategies for redevelopment.





CITY EMPLOYEES SMASH RECORD FOR UNITED WAY

WILSON CITY EMPLOYEES broke all records in 2019 when they pledged to more than \$130,000 to United Way of Wilson County, the largest single-year increase in the city's history.

The city's United Way campaign concluded in August with a total of \$131,333 in cash donations and pledges. The total was nearly \$18,000, or more than 15 percent, over its 2018 tally.

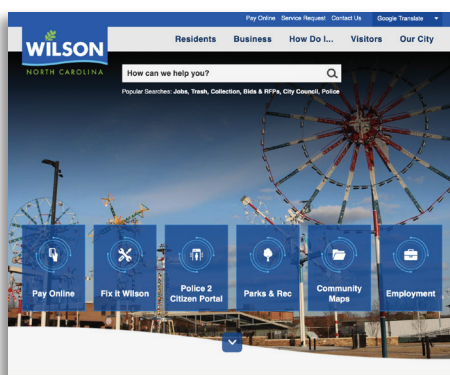
Deputy City Manager Harry Tyson said he was "extremely proud" of how city employees responded to this year's campaign.

"We are a Pacesetter company and we have gotten this year off to a great start," said Tyson, who is chairing the countywide United Way campaign.

Judi Thurston, executive director of the United Way, said, "The City of Wilson always runs one of the most fun and exciting campaigns. They truly understand our mission."

The city has conducted United Way campaigns annually since 1960. Its totals have been over \$100,000 now for five years in a row.

NEW WEBSITE IMPROVES RESIDENTS' ABILITY TO ACCESS SERVICES



THE CITY UPDATED

its website, WilsonNC.org, in February, the first major overhaul in several years.

The new website was designed to work seamlessly

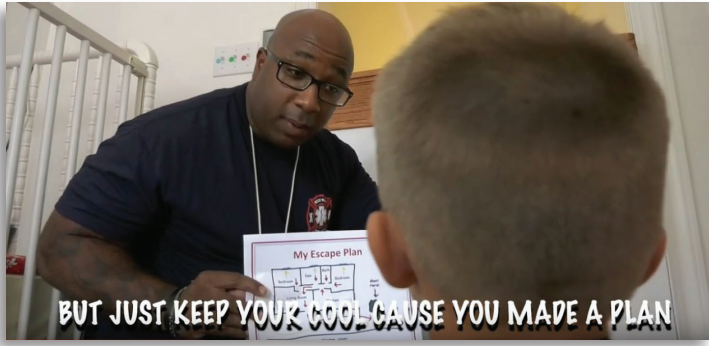
on computers, tablets, smartphones and other mobile devices. Users could either use a search bar to find services, but the design also added in strong navigation tools to help users quickly find the content they need.

The new website was designed to be more visually appealing and dynamic. It also added content for visitors and residents.

The website had to work with all third-party websites, such as on-line bill pay, recreation program registration and the Police 2 Citizen portal. It had to continue working with online bill payers.

The project was more than a year in the works and heavily involved the city's communications, Greenlight and other staff. The city also redesigned Greenlight's website. The city's website has gone through many changes since it launched in 1998, but major overhauls have been rare.

WILSON FIRE/RESCUE SERVICES PARTNERS TO DELIVER SAFETY MESSAGE, WIN NATIONAL AWARD



IN AUGUST, Wilson Fire/Rescue Services, the Rocky Mount Fire Department and Greenville Fire/Rescue earned the top prize in UL's "Close Before You Doze" national video contest urging people to close bedroom doors before going to sleep.

"We were happy to see three fire departments so inspired that they came together to make their brilliant original song and educational music video to remind people to put the Close Before You Doze message into practice and share it with their community," said Zoe Susice, director of research amplification at the UL Firefighter Safety Research Institute.

The recognition came with a \$25,000 cash prize, split between the departments, to be used for education programs.

"It will be used to fund outreach programs to audiences that are usually not targeted," said WF/RS life safety educator, Shauna Allen-Smith. "When people think of fire prevention month, they think about 'stop, drop and roll' and the outreach for second graders, but hopefully this will help fund some programs for older adults, especially those living alone. We also want to do some programs for our special needs community that is often overlooked and our deaf and hard-of-hearing community."

Allen-Smith conducts dozens of safety presentations annually, both in schools and child care facilities and at Wilson's award-winning Fire & Life Safety Adventure House.

The institute will use the winning video online to promote the importance of closing doors before going to sleep. According to the National Fire Protection Association, people had 17 minutes to escape from a fire 40 years ago, but with the popularity of synthetic fabrics and lighter construction materials, officials have shortened that escape time to three minutes.

Check out the video at: <https://bit.ly/2UCIhUe>

POLICE DEPARTMENT FORENSIC UNIT UPGRADED

IN SEPTEMBER, the Police Department held its first Forensic Unit Open House to debut its new facilities. The event was held in celebration of Forensic Science Week.

Forensic analysts showcased the police department's forensic facilities and capabilities as well as gave tours, provided demonstrations and answered questions. All tours were conducted by the department's forensic analysts.



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