



DOWNTOWN WILSON DRAWS INNOVATORS, MONEY FOR NEW HUB

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILSON has always attracted creators, artists and entrepreneurs, but those connections grew even stronger due to 2018 developments.

The city received a \$1.1 million grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation to construct an innovation hub, a unique co-working space to encourage start-ups and foster entrepreneurship in Wilson. This grant will be matched by up to \$1.6 million from the city, although revenues may reduce that amount.

The city will be redeveloping a property at 127 Goldsboro Street to include individual work spaces and small office suites for growing companies. The building will feature gigabit service from Greenlight Community Broadband. Support services such as legal, financial and marketing expertise will be offered, as well as diverse programming to build connections.

City Manager Grant Goings said in October that the goal was to have "a place where people could come with like-minded entrepreneurs to gather, learn from each other, to have a co-working space and a home base that would represent the innovation economy in

Wilson... We believe that we are on the path for Wilson to become the epicenter of smart city technologies."

Those discussions had already begun. This was the third year that the Boykin Theater has hosted GigEast, an annual discussion of how emerging technologies are changing life and jobs in eastern North Carolina. The November 2018 session was on the future of work and looked at the challenges of business creation, talent recruitment and other issues.



City Manager Grant Goings addresses attendees at the annual GigEast technology conference in Wilson



PUBLIC SAFETY ACCLAIMED AMONG BEST IN NATION

WILSON'S EMERGENCY RESPONDERS

earned honors in 2018 that mark the departments among the tops in their field. Wilson Fire/Rescue Services was notified last summer that the city's Insurance Service Rating (ISO) had improved to Class 1, the highest of 10 rankings. That means the agency's response times, equipment, training and other factors were evaluated and found to be at maximum protection from fire loss.

"I am extremely proud of our department for this achievement," said Wilson Fire Chief Albert Alston. "Wilson is the first department east of the Triangle to earn a Class 1 rating, which is a tremendous accomplishment for fire service in eastern North Carolina." Only 12 of more than 1,500 fire departments statewide are rated as Class 1. Also in 2018, Wilson Police Department achieved CALEA gold standard accreditation with excellence, the highest achievement a department can reach. The department has been accredited since 1987 but had not before received this level. "Gold standard is the highest we could apply for as a law enforcement agency," said Capt. Kendra Howell. "Our department is rich within the accreditation process, therefore we knew we could achieve this status."

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies process looked at 320 mandatory standards for WPD, but officers completed 75 optional ones as well. Fewer than 5 percent of all law enforcement agencies are CALEA accredited at gold level. Also, Police Chief Thomas Hopkins was selected as the National PAL Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. This recognized his efforts to expand the Wilson Police Athletic League's community outreach efforts.

Chief Hopkins's passion for our community and reaching youth has transformed Wilson's PAL program from one football camp each summer to a year-round program with more than 30 annual programs and events. Approximately 700-800 youth are influenced through all the camps, programs, and activities that Wilson PD PAL conducts annually. "I would like to give honor and thanks to God for blessing the PAL program," said Chief Hopkins during his acceptance.

ROTARY CLUB SPARKS MAKEOVER OF CITY PARK

A TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECT began in 2018 for one of the city's largest parks, which will reopen in 2019 with many new features. Work is being completed on Rotary Park, formerly Cavalier Park. Once it reopens this spring, the park will include soccer fields, pickleball courts, a playground, increased parking and the city's first paved track, accessible for people using wheelchairs or have other restricted mobility. The project is also intended to fix a flooding problem that often left the park muddy and unusable.

The project cost around \$750,000, but a state Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant covered half the cost. The Rotary Club of Greater Wilson contributed \$100,000 toward the dollar-for-dollar match required by the city. "We've been wanting to do something with this park for 10 years and I am thankful the Rotary Club of Greater Wilson helped make it possible," Lee told *The Wilson Times* in December. "I don't think folks understand that their financial commitment to the construction of the park was by far the biggest one throughout the state by a civic group during the PARTF grant process. It made quite an impression with the board that votes on the grants."

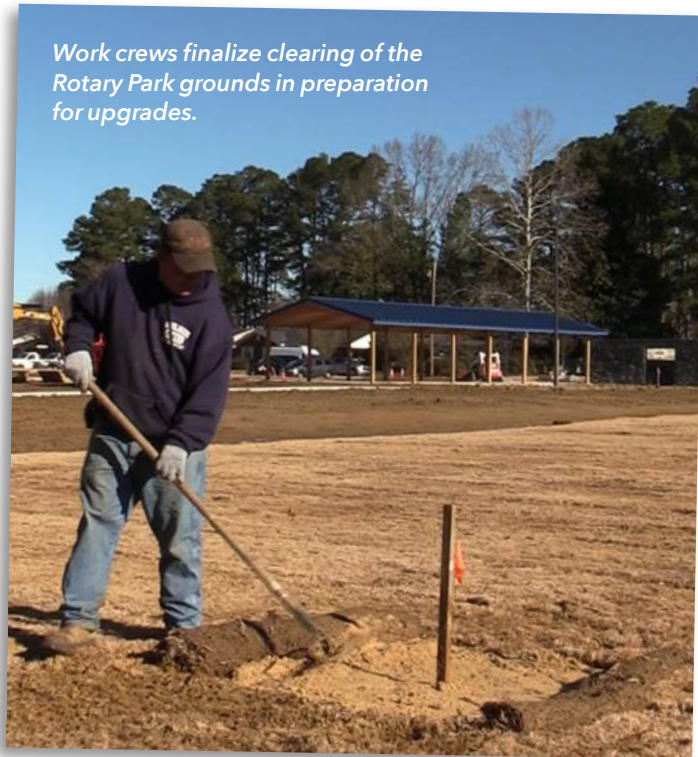


WILSON CREWS FACED HURRICANES, WINTER WEATHER

WILSON SAT FOR DAYS in September in the middle of projections for Hurricane Florence before the storm ultimately tracked south. Still, the hurricane brought almost 36 inches of rain to some parts of North Carolina and caused some anxious moments in Wilson. The city had around 10 inches of rain over three days and flash flood warnings persisted for nearly all of the county. More than a dozen roads were closed inside the city. Trees fell and caused sporadic outages. More than 1,100 Wilson Energy customers were affected over those three days.

The widespread damage across North Carolina led many city personnel to lend assistance elsewhere. Wilson Energy crews assisted in Launenburg. The city's water team helped with flooded Jacksonville and Onslow County. An environmental services crew assisted with debris removal in New Bern. And housing inspectors helped in several coastal communities. Hurricane Michael brought more rain and wind in October. City crews were also tested by snowstorms in January and December 2018.

Work crews finalize clearing of the Rotary Park grounds in preparation for upgrades.





LAKE WILSON SURGES IN POPULARITY WITH NEW BRIDGE

LAKE WILSON has long been a gem in the city's park system, but the completion of a pedestrian bridge in July 2018 made it one of the most popular spots in town. The 1,000-foot bridge made it possible for walkers, bikers and others to complete a 2-mile circuit around the lake. A recent survey had found that Wilson residents wanted more trails, greenways and options for walking, and they certainly took to Lake Wilson. "This bridge has been a huge, huge success; it's getting used all the time, which is great," Parks and Recreation

Director David Lee said in July. The bridge was made possible in part by a \$50,000 grant from the Merck Foundation. "The City of Wilson is extremely grateful to Merck and its employees for this donation to improve recreation opportunities," said Wilson Mayor Bruce Rose. "Merck has shown time and again to be a great corporate partner with the Wilson community." The city is now planning to add restrooms and other facilities at the park.

WHIRLIGIG PARK BRINGS WINDFALL OF INTEREST IN FIRST YEAR

THE VOLLIS SIMPSON WHIRLIGIG PARK attracted visitors from all over into Historic Downtown Wilson in its first full year of operation. Opening in November 2017, the park became the place to be in 2018, becoming the home of Wilson's concert series, Downtown Alive (renamed Gig in the Park) and Downtown Beats & Eats. Thousands of people attended the concerts in the summer and fall.

The city partnered with Cucalorus, the non-profit film festival in Wilmington, to present a series of family films on Friday nights in April and May. The movies proved so popular that a fall series was held in October and a second spring series is scheduled for 2019. The N.C. Whirligig Festival was centered around the park for the first time in 2018 with the main musical acts performing on its stage. Attendance was announced close to 50,000 for the two-day event with the park being a major draw.





U.S. 301 WORK GETS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

IN APRIL 2018, city, state and federal officials broke ground for a \$18 million project to improve the U.S. 301 corridor. Work was quickly begun on the U.S. 301 TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) project. The TIGER planning process was begun in 2015 when the City of Wilson was awarded a \$10 million federal grant to improve a portion of US 301. In November 2016, the North Carolina Board of Transportation added \$6.5 million to the project, meaning a larger section of the highway corridor will be included.

The project's goal is to add a raised median, sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks and improve the storm water infrastructure along a 1.2 mile section of U.S. 301. The new systems are eliminating open ditches and other areas of concern. The sidewalks are currently being added along Herring Avenue and other side streets to improve pedestrian safety to the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, Sallie B. Howard School for the Arts, Wilson Community College and other locations. The project will be finished by 2022.



GREENLIGHT MARKS 10 YEARS, NEARS 10,000 CUSTOMERS

IN 2018, Greenlight, Wilson's community broadband service, celebrated 10 years of providing cable television, telephone and Internet services to city residents. The Wilson City Council

had decided in fall 2005 to use the city's fiber optic network, which connected all city facilities, as the backbone of a new city service to provide blazing fast Internet access, along with other services. The City Council was motivated to help BB&T and other major employers after they failed attempts to have private providers improve Internet service. Council voted

to build a Fiber to the Home system, making service available to every address in the city.

The city began signing up Greenlight customers in May 2008 with a trial for 115 homes. By July, surveys showed the vast majority of households preferred Greenlight to existing services. Within 14 months, the city had more than 3,600 active members. In 2013, Wilson became the first municipality in North Carolina to offer gigabit service (up to 1G bits upload and download speeds). That service was approximately 100 times faster than average Internet connections at the time.



CITY IMPROVES GOLDSBORO STREET, WELCOMES INVESTMENTS DOWNTOWN

A SECTION OF GOLDSBORO STREET got a new look as utility work was completed for the new Whirligig Station apartment project. While installing new water and sewer lines, the city relocated all electrical lines underground on Goldsboro Street between Nash Street and the former Hi-Dollar Warehouse. Natural Gas lines were added and the stormwater infrastructure was improved. Above ground the city replaced all sidewalks, added new decorative lighting and planted new street trees with lighting.

Whirligig Station has begun pre-leasing 94 apartments for spring 2019. The facility will also house a restaurant and a visitors center for the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park. Also in 2018, BB&T announced plans for a 95,000-square-foot facility to open on Pine Street. The new \$35 million building will accommodate 650 BB&T associates who work in the iconic towers on Nash Street or elsewhere in Wilson. Once that building opens, the towers will be demolished. In December, the City Council approved a deal for the historic Cherry Hotel to be redeveloped as a boutique hotel and special event center. Work was expected to begin in early 2019 with the hotel opening in 2020.



Sidewalks were just one example of areas that were improved as part of the renovation project.