

ANNOUNCER: You've tuned in to another edition of The Break Room. A

weekly conversation about how the City of St Augustine

works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the

City of St Augustine's Communications Director, Melissa

Wissel. The Break Room offers a closer look at the different

City departments and provides updates on current and upcoming

projects and events. And now your host, Melissa Wissel.

MELISSA: Welcome to The Break Room. Thanks for tuning in. I'm

Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the City of St

Augustine. Every year, the City Commission recognizes

individuals for their

outstanding service and

contributions to the City by

way of presenting awards. These

awards are the DeAviles Award,

the Adelaide Sanchez Award, and

the Order of La Florida. The

awards were created over many,

many years and each award

carries with it distinct

criteria which must be met by

its recipients. They are

nominated by a City

Commissioner, confirmed by a

unanimous vote of the

Commission, and then the awards

are presented at a time that

coincides with a milestone in

the City's history. In

September, coinciding with the

founding of the City of St
Augustine, the Nation's Oldest

City, our City Commission Recognized

Mr Greg White with the 2022

Order of La Florida Award. So,

for the first time in The Break

Room, I've invited Greg to join
me and talk about this

prestigious award. Greg,
welcome and congratulations.

GREG: Thank you very much. It's a
pleasure to be here. MELISSA: The Order

of La Florida recognizes an
individual and I'm going to

quote the criteria here.... Over a
long period of time has

unselfishly devoted time and
talent to the welfare and

betterment of St Augustine's
citizens and heritage. Who has

exemplified the finest
qualities of citizenship and

has contributed extraordinary
services to the community. That

about sums up your work here in
St Augustine. You

have been very active in this
community, your entire life.

You grew up here. Let's start
off. Tell us a little bit about

yourself and then we can talk
about the award. GREG: Alrighty.

Yeah. I grew up in St
Augustine, came here in
fifth grade. And I was born in a
big city in Florida called

Johnson Crossroad. We have one
stop sign, with no traffic light. So, I

moved to St Augustine and
saw the bright lights. MELISSA:

No mobility issues there. GREG: Not
exactly. MELISSA: You served in the

military, but you came back. You
were living in St Augustine

during the Civil Rights. I
think you've shared with us, if

you wouldn't mind. Share us a
little bit about how that kind

of shaped where you find
yourself today and so much of

the projects you're involved
with. GREG: Right. Well, the civil

rights struggle, of course, was
got very heated in 63, and then

moved on to 64. And what would
happen doing the struggle, I was

at Murray High School at that

time. It was a high school, not a

middle school. And of course
this is segregation, so it was

all black teachers and all
black students. And when the

movement came, the first person
came down, one of the first was

a young guy named Reverend
Taylor. And after Taylor came

down a gentleman named CT
Vivian, and then when Jose

Williams came down he lit the
place up. He people ready to

walk the water, go through fire, he
was that kind of a speaker. And

what would happen is we would
be at Murray High School, like I

stated. And our principal name
was Richard J Murray, about five

six, but he could pick up a
building and had memory that

was like an elephant. And so he
would stand at one door and he

would yell, go back to your
classroom, baritone voice, go

back to your classrooms. And he
would hold his hands out, and

then of course the students
will stop. But then we run to

another door to beat him to the other door,
and we and it was back and

forth, until we get all the
students out. And then we'd walk

from Murray High School to the
corner of Holmes and King, and

then the Florida Memorial
students would pick us up from

that site. And we would walk
from that site all the way to

The Plaza, but then we call it

The Slave Market, singing and

singing and singing, so. And that

was an experience. MELISSA: I'll bet. And

you came, after you came back

from a military service. You

Worked for FPL. Had a a career

there. And you retired in 2002. Excuse

me. GREG: Right. MELISSA: And that's really

kind of where you started

getting involved in the

community. GREG: Exactly. MELISSA: Tell

us a little bit about how you

got started. GREG: It's kind of

ironic. That was during the

era when it was a lot of crack

cocaine prostitutes in in West

Augustine. And I had a

granddaughter staying with me

at that particular time. And she
was in a middle school and we

would stand on our porch
because she would pick up from

Volusia, and Volusia and Pearl, and
so we stand up and she would

catch the bus. And then the
prostitutes came to the corner

and I would call the police,
very irritated, etcetera

etcetera. And their solution was,
well let's just move at that

time. Let's move
the students to another

location and the
prostitute stayed on the corner.

And that aggravated the heck
out of me. So I spoke with the

young lady named Faye Davis and
I was just complaining and

complaining, and they say have

you ever heard of the CRA, I

said no, I haven't heard of the CRA,

She said, well it's a group

that's for the betterment of

West Augustine, and your concern

they do address. I said okay, when

are they meeting? She said tonight,

and I say I'll be there. And I

came to that meeting and of

course I echoed, let's get

the students back on the corner,

and that's how my involvement

began, and then it went from

there, and then I stayed another

year and another year and

another year. And what really

was strange during that

that particular time. I came on

simply to to get the

prostitutes off the corner, to get more policing,

etcetera etcetera. And I went to

the director of housing at that

time named Tom Crawford, and I

said this is what we need, this

is what we need. He said, how do

you know? I said, because I live

in the community. He said no, we

gotta do better than that. I

said, what do you want to do? He

said, let's conduct the survey.

I said okay, so be it. I know

policing going to be number one.

So, we go to the different

churches, we pass out the

surveys, we do blocks and we

pass out, pass out. And the

survey came back and it says

the community want youth

activities. They want
infrastructure, and third, they

want policing. So, number one
was youth activities.

Henceforth, the birth of the
Solomon Calhoun Center and

Pool. That's how it came about.

MELISSA: Wow and it and it just came

from going to a meeting. GREG: It
came going to a meeting with me

echoing my displeasure of that
particular corner. MELISSA: And here it

is, 20 some odd years later. MELISSA: So
many years later. So many years

later. And you are now tuning
into The Break Room. This is Melissa

Wissel. I'm the Communications
Director for the City of St

Augustine. I have the pleasure
of speaking with Mr Greg

White. He is the recipient of
the 2022 Order of LaFlorida

Award. I, Greg at the at the
risk of us going over, I

want to keep talking about the
things that you've been doing,

and if we have to invite you
back again to finish our

conversation, I'm going to do
that, if that's alright with you. GREG: That's fine.

MELISSA: Because I love the work that
you've done here and I've only

just recently met you because
of this award. And I'm so honored

to to know you. You just
mentioned the birth of the

Solomon Calhoun Center and the
pool. You also were involved

with the American Legion. Talk
to us about where the the Kids

Safe Zone came from and
what all what the work is

that's being done there. GREG: Sure
thing. Okay, I was the

commander of a Post 194
during this particular time in

1995, '96, '97.

And we had

retired educators in our
meeting. Mr William Dupree

was one and he stood up in a
meeting one time and he says,

the reason so many kids in our
neighborhood failed is simply

because they don't, they don't
do the homework nor is it

correct when they do it. And so

after that meeting, I spoke

with the gentleman who is
deceased now, Cornelius Jones.

And I said, Cornelius, Webster
is right up the street, a

rockthrow from us. I said,
well, why don't we just go to

Webster tomorrow, which would be
Monday, and let's start a a

homeroom, a place where they can
do the homework correctly. He said

okay, let's do it. So we go up
and we spoke with the Vice

President, the Vice Principal, as
well as the Principal, and the

Vice Principal thought it was
like the greatest thing since

sliced pie. You're not going to,
you're not going to charge the

kids anything? Of course not,
you're not going to charge them

anything. And so we go and we
talk and then we get it all

straight. 20... 26 years now. We
are still there, we charge our

kids absolutely nothing. And I
had a third grader who I had got very

attached to. She's very sprite
little girl and I says Anasia,

I said, what's the best thing
you like about the American

Legion Kids Safe Zone. I
thought she was going to say

the tutors. I thought she was
going to say field trips.

Without hesitation, she said
the snacks. Without hesitation.

MELISSA: That's right. That's right.
Well, you can get just about

anybody to anything if you
offer food. GREG: Exactly. Very true.

MELISSA: Very true. And one last
thing, the big one that I

want to talk about, and is the
project that you worked on with

City Manager John Regan, also
then Public Works Director.

GREG: Martha Graham. MELISSA: Martha Graham.
Tell me about septic to sewer,

what a difference that has made,
and continues to make. GREG: That

that's really was the greatest
hurdle in bringing economic

development to West Augustine.
The old saying is, and where the

curving ends, prosperity dies.
Okay. And our hurdle was sewer,

as well as water, but more sewer

than water at the time. So

working with City Manager John
Regan and Martha Graham, we all

sat down and say okay what
movement can we put together to

expand the sewer in West
Augustine, so we could build now

houses, because we have the
sewer. One, but also to bring

businesses to West Augustine.

The first national franchise to

come to West Augustine was the
Family Dollar Store. And that

was because of Martha Graham
thinking out of the box and

City Manager out of the box and
providing sewer for that

particular location. So now we
have another, we have Family

Dollar and the Dollar General is
a rockthrow from them ,so they

are competing with one another
now. But more importantly, or

just as importantly, is the
failure septic systems in my

area. The sump pump might cost
between \$300 - \$500 to get it

repaired and needless to
say it won't get repaired. So

now we're talking sewer and we
went straight by street

starting on Duval and St
Johns, from st street all

the way to 15th street,
systematically get people on water, as

well as sewer. MELISSA: So it's not
haphazard. You, it's, and

it's a tedious process. It's
it's grant applications that go to the

state, right? State

funding that.... GREG: We have been very successful, especially this year

with the City, getting grant funds to really address the

needs of the failures of the septic systems in West

Augustine. MELISSA: I'll be honest, I wouldn't think about something

like septic being a reason that something like a Family Dollar

wouldn't come somewhere, but that it makes that much of a

difference. I wouldn't connect those dots. GREG: You wouldn't

connect those. MELISSA: I don't know if that's naïve of me or if

anybody else feels the same way, I wouldn't have put that

together. GREG: It would be too much
on the septic system per se to

handle that kind of volume.

Alrighty. So, you do

need the sewer, but any
business. That's

going to be a business a viable
business, okay? They definitely

need that part of it. And then,
and another kudos to the City

Manager. This is unprecedented
in West Augustine and I've been

working since '02.

He and I, Johnny and I was

riding back from Florida
Memorial University and Florida

Memorial University have
dangled a carrot as to coming

back, as to putting something on
a 300 plus acres. And every time

we get close, they moved to
carrot. I went to Miami several

times. I know the City Manager
went several times. So, we was

coming back from the
properties, okay? And as we was

riding back, we was
disappointed because they had

moved the carrot again. And so,
they were doing work on Volusia

and King and the City Manager
say, Greg what are they doing

here? I said, they are just
upgrading the road, Volusia

Street they're putting in
curbing, they doing this and

doing that. And he said well,
Greg, why don't we make that our

economic development corridor,

Volusia and King Street. I said,

that sounds great. The city
pursued that and made that

happen without an applicant.

Let's fast forward to 2022.

The new Dollar General Store
going to go that site. That's

one. Two, 92 affordable
apartment built, viability

housing going to go at that
site. Three, the medical

complex going to go at that
site. Okay, that that's how we

move that needle. MELISSA: And on
that note, we are going to be

out of time, but we're going to,
we're going to leave off at the

medical complex, and that
development that we're seeing

over there at Volusia, because
that is what you're, that's

what you're working on next.

GREG: Exactly. MELISSA: So, we have to

continue this conversation
because we've only just begun.

GREG: Okay. MELISSA: So, I'm going to invite
you back. GREG: Alright. MELISSA: If you're

just now tuning in or you
missed part of this broadcast

and you want to go back and
listen from the beginning, you

can now find us on your
favorite podcast. Look for us

on Spotify, iHeartRadio, Apple
Podcast, and more. You can find

a complete listing of our
podcast platforms and our past

episodes online at CityStAugRadio.com. Be sure to

follow us on all of our social media platforms. You'll find us

on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @CityStAug.

Thanks for tuning in. Until next time. ANNOUNCER: You've been

listening to The Break Room, a weekly program addressing

projects and programs offered by the City of St Augustine.

Join us each week as the City's Communications Director,

Melissa Wissel, has in-depth conversations with the people

who make our town work to meet the needs of our community. The

Break Room is produced by Communication Specialist for

the City of St. Augustine, Cindy Walker. See you at this

time next week for another

edition of The Break Room.