

Transcript

00:00:00 Narrator

You tuned into another edition of the break room, a weekly conversation about how the city of Saint Augustine works from those who do the work every day, hosted by the City of Saint 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.

00:00:20 Narrator

Melissa Wissel.

00:00:21 Melissa Wissel

Welcome to the break room and thanks for tuning in. I'm **Melissa Wissel**, communications director for the City of Saint Augustine.

00:00:27 Melissa Wissel

Every year, the city Commission recognizes individuals for outstanding service and contributions to the city by way of presenting awards in the month of May to coincide with historic Preservation Month. The Adelaide Sanchez Award is presented. There are two categories, one for historic preservation and restoration, and the other this year's.

00:00:47 Melissa Wissel

Honoree category is for historic education and interpretation. Each of those citizen awards, which were created over many years, carries with it distinct criteria which must be met.

00:00:58 Melissa Wissel

And they are nominated by a commissioner and confirmed by unanimous vote of the Commission this year. Commissioner Barbara Blonder nominated Regina Gayle Phillips for the 2024 Adelaide Sanchez Award for Historic Education and Interpretation on May 13th, the City Commission presented Gayle with the prestigious.

00:01:18 Melissa Wissel

Commemorative marble lion statue and in studio this week I have the pleasure to introduce Gayle Phillips. Gayle, congratulations and welcome to the break room.

00:01:27 Gayle Phillips

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

00:01:29 Gayle Phillips

Here.

00:01:30 Melissa Wissel

It's great to have you. You're so involved in our community.

00:01:33 Melissa Wissel

I do want to start with your current role as Executive Director of the Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center. It's located there in the heart of Lincolnville. Tell us about the museum and the work that you do there.

00:01:46 Gayle Phillips

Well, we have the job of telling the story of some of the earliest black history in America in the Lakeville Museum. So we cover about 5 centuries, pretty much of black history here in America. So we tell those stories through interactive exhibits we have.

00:02:06 Gayle Phillips

Hmm.

00:02:07 Gayle Phillips

Educational programs there we also have a Cultural Center, which is a part of our name and that program, we do documentary screenings, a lot of different kinds of things. One of the other things we are doing there is also the historic preservation of that facility, which is almost 100 years old, and we're going to kick off our 100th anniversary.

00:02:29 Gayle Phillips

This year in June, going up to June at 2025 will be one.

00:02:34 Gayle Phillips

Years, but we're going to do that during our Juneteenth celebration this year, which will be on actually our heritage luncheon this year is on June 15th and we're actually having it off site at the Renaissance Hotel here in Saint Augustine because we weren't sure who would be under construction at that time. So we're having it off site, but we have an array of programs.

00:02:55 Gayle Phillips

In the month of June, a lot of commemorative dates for the 60th anniversary of the civil rights movement here in Saint Augustine from the summer of 64, when Doctor King, doctor Martin Luther King Junior was here, and a lot of protests took place leading up to this.

00:03:10 Melissa Wissel

A lot of history here.

00:03:12 Melissa Wissel

Black history not just to be celebrated during Black History Month.

00:03:13 Gayle Phillips

Absolutely.

00:03:15 Gayle Phillips

Right year round and and that's all part of what we do. I mean, we're open now, we're open, you know, every day, seven days a week. So you know we have a lot of history that we cover and but this year we are celebrating throughout the city of Saint Augustine.

00:03:32 Gayle Phillips

Throughout Saint Johns County, I should say the 60th anniversary of, you know, revisiting the summer of 64, which was very.

00:03:40 Gayle Phillips

Significant leading up to the signing of the Civil Rights Act, and I think the last thing is going to be actually on July 2nd, which is not us but a sister museum near Ford Museum will have their luncheon right celebrating, you know, the passage of that.

00:03:53 Melissa Wissel

Community lunch date.

00:03:58 Melissa Wissel

And you've been with the museum?

00:04:00 Melissa Wissel

In Lincolnville since 2015, if that's correct, that's.

00:04:04 Melissa Wissel

And you started as a volunteer. I. You're doing great things now. Tell us a little bit about if you, if you want to share with us sort of your start the Lincoln of course. Because all of this contributes to.

00:04:07 Gayle Phillips

He did.

00:04:18 Melissa Wissel

Your naming of the Adelaide Sanchez Award recipient because of your contributions, you started as a volunteer. You started the Lincolnville jazz at the Excelsior and and June 10th you mentioned and like you said, the preservation of the facility itself, any other things?

00:04:37 Melissa Wissel

You go back to when you started.

00:04:38 Gayle Phillips

Yeah.

00:04:39 Melissa Wissel

So like what? Tell tell you a little bit.

00:04:41 Melissa Wissel

About your path, your walk here.

00:04:42 Gayle Phillips

So we, we've done a lot of things in terms of a lot of it has been to try to get to a point of sustainability of the museum. So the first thing we did was a jazz series that's now we call it Lincolnville business, jazz at the Excelsior.

00:05:00 Gayle Phillips

This year it's been suspended because of the construction that was pending for the restoration for the 2nd floor, but it will come back next January. OK. And we people have been asking us.

00:05:07 Melissa Wissel

That's right.

00:05:15 Gayle Phillips

What happened to your?

00:05:15 Gayle Phillips

Jazz program. And so it's like we've created a following of people. It's not a very large.

00:05:21 Gayle Phillips

You, but it holds about 120 people and it's a good fundraising source for the museum as well, but.

00:05:27 Gayle Phillips

Also, the community has come together and they come to.

00:05:30 Melissa Wissel

Expect and that's the burden of wanting to improve, restore, renovate. You have to suspend what you're working on.

00:05:30 Gayle Phillips

Back then.

00:05:37 Gayle Phillips

Absolutely.

00:05:38 Gayle Phillips

Yeah. So that's that's been a challenge because like I said, it's also fundraiser because we are nonprofit and fundraising is a big part of what we.

00:05:42 **Melissa Wissel**

Mm-hmm.

00:05:46 Gayle Phillips

Do every day.

00:05:48 Gayle Phillips

And so we have to find ways to, you know, make that happen. So our heritage luncheon is another one of those big events. What we've done in the last couple of years, we started out with the Living Legends luncheon and then, you know, we pivoted a little bit because of the.

00:06:03 Gayle Phillips

Construction and went to Juneteenth Heritage luncheon. And so we've kind of rolled in kind of like together and we do a lot of the heritage celebration or the legacy living legend stuff through our women who made a difference that has included both living and, you know, non living members of the community.

00:06:24 Gayle Phillips

This year we added Miss Cora Tyson, who's like getting ready to turn 101, and we absolutely and Miss Barbara Vickers, who was one of our original people, already turned 101, miss.

00:06:28 **Melissa Wissel**

Yes.

00:06:29 **Melissa Wissel**

She is still with us.

00:06:31 **Melissa Wissel**

Yes. Yes. Who? Right. Yep.

00:06:36 Gayle Phillips

So next year we will lay out Doctor Dorothy Israel, who's also going to be turning 100.

00:06:43 **Melissa Wissel**

That's wonderful. That's so exciting. The and you are very involved in the community. If you're just now tuning in, let me just take a quick minute to let folks know you're listening to the break room and we have. GAIL Phillips is in studio with us. She is our 2024 Adelaide Sanchez Award recipient for Historic Education and interpret.

00:07:02 **Melissa Wissel**

Patient. Really leading the charge of projects and spearheading things over at the Lincolnville Museum, you're involved with the lighthouse, the Historical Society, and you are our chairperson for the TDC.

00:07:17

I am so first of all, I rode off the lighthouse board. I think about a year ago because you you.

00:07:20 Melissa Wissel

OK, OK, OK. OK. Gotcha.

00:07:23

Two terms and I did two terms which I didn't realize was six years. It went by so quickly, but you know still very interested and a lot of things are happening there. You know, they have some great.

00:07:27 Melissa Wissel

Yeah.

00:07:34 Melissa Wissel

Rams and offerings for the community historic they're celebrating 150 years this year. I think it's a big year for anniversaries, lots of anniversaries this year.

00:07:38

Side.

00:07:42

It is, yeah. Yeah. But I I still serve on the Saint Augustine Historical Society Board. And this year I am chairperson of the local tourist development council.

00:07:53 Melissa Wissel

So I want to shift gears here a little bit. We have a huge, I won't say it's an announcement today because it's people have been talking about it, it's already been.

00:08:04 Melissa Wissel

But I will take this opportunity to champion the committee that you were sitting on as you were a part of, you were appointed by the Florida Speaker of the House of Representatives, Paul Renner, to serve on the Florida Museum of Black History Task Force. It was created by Governor DeSantis and we have been named.

00:08:24 Melissa Wissel

For recommendation, we want to be very careful to say we've hasn't officially been finalized, but Saint Augustine was named for recommendation by that Task force to be the location for the Black History Museum in Florida. Tell us about sitting on that.

00:08:42 Melissa Wissel

Board at had to have been exciting, challenging all of the above Nashik hand ringing and congratulations to you for being named on that. And I I'll just give a a congratulations to us

collectively on that. The county has has been named forward you know been set forward to do that so.

00:08:46 Gayle Phillips

All of the above.

00:09:03 Melissa Wissel

Else about that.

00:09:04 Gayle Phillips

Right. So you know, we have so much.

00:09:08 Gayle Phillips

Black history here in Saint Augustine that we have really worked hard to tell the world about to tell, you know, to really push it out. And we're starting to get a lot of national recognition for the earliest black history in not just Florida, but in the entire nation, right. And so to have that museum, you know, poised to come to Saint Augustine.

00:09:30 Gayle Phillips

No, it's not a done deal yet. I don't want people to just celebrate too soon because it still has to go through that final recommendation and then we are just a task force of Community people from throughout the state of Florida, some elected officials, some are just serving different capacities throughout the Community.

00:09:34 Melissa Wissel

Right, right.

00:09:48 Gayle Phillips

That will make a recommendation, and then it still also has to get funded through the legislature to be constructed and then a plan. You know, our plan was to come up with a recommendation on how and where. And you know how it can become self-sustaining and that's what we've been working on almost a year.

00:10:08 Melissa Wissel

You know, and what the other cities, I mean, we were in the running with some pretty tough.

00:10:13 Gayle Phillips

Cities. Wonderful places. Yeah. So, but I think, you know, the the task force selected, we narrowed it down to four. We started I think with 13 presentations from different locations. Some just didn't make a lot of sense at all, to be honest with you. And so 8 presented formal.

00:10:13 Melissa Wissel

So not just those 3.

00:10:33 Gayle Phillips

Applications to be considered and out of those eight, we ranked the top four and then we did another ranking down to the top three and this past week the vote came in that we would take the top ranked museum and give that as a recommendation to the.

00:10:51 Gayle Phillips

Governor. And so there's still, you know, other two, the two other places that were in.

00:10:56 Gayle Phillips

The top three.

00:10:57 Gayle Phillips

Or Eatonville which you know has a really good claim to be a location. I think it's a wonderful idea. It was the first in.

00:11:10 Gayle Phillips

Well, there's still a couple more, but the first incorporated Black City in the country that goes back to the 18, I think 70s. OK. But we also had Opa-locka in South Florida, so two locations with high traffic area.

00:11:16 Melissa Wissel

OK. Thank you.

00:11:30 Gayle Phillips

Saint Augustine, little as traffic, but a lot more history and a lot more people who come just for.

00:11:37 Gayle Phillips

So a lot of people come through here because we are, you know, the northeast part of the where we have Fort Mosaic. We haven't met. To me that's like a huge.

00:11:48 Gayle Phillips

It was the first free black settlement, first sanctioned black settlement in in the country and I don't think that we can overlook that. I think that, you know, we had a lot of people who have a lot of historians who have worked on making sure that that history gets told we're the only UNESCO site.

00:12:06 Gayle Phillips

Ohh, really? Yes, four hose in the state so.

00:12:08 Melissa Wissel

That's incredible. That takes a lot of work to.

00:12:11 Gayle Phillips

It does and and and so it's very significant. It is a site, you know, that's sanctioned by the United Nations. So it's kind of big. Yeah, it's pretty big. So, you know, it's not something that just sneeze at and say, oh, yeah, yeah. Well, even though it wasn't incorporated, it was still here.

00:12:20 Melissa Wissel

That's good.

00:12:21 Melissa Wissel

It's kind of a deal.

00:12:31 Gayle Phillips

It was one of those first places where people were really fighting to regain their freedom, that they came and they settled it. Fort Mosaic and that story is one that is being told.

00:12:36 Melissa Wissel

Right.

00:12:43 Melissa Wissel

Around the world, I mean, we were just in, you know, British press earlier this year talking about that story well and in and of itself. You know, Fort Mosaic has the Jazz Festival. They've done that. Now is it the three years, maybe two or three fundraiser for.

00:12:59 Gayle Phillips

Yeah, it's.

00:13:00 Gayle Phillips

So this will be.

00:13:01 Gayle Phillips

The 4th year coming up, yeah.

00:13:03 Melissa Wissel

The Fort to be built. It's a beautiful venue. They've partnered and done some really nice work with.

00:13:09 Melissa Wissel

Amp and of course music is such a draw for people coming to Saint Augustine, so it's so wonderful that you have your hand in it to be a part of that and that you represent our community. So, we thank you for that. And I think it was a great selection this year for you.

00:13:29 Melissa Wissel

To be recognized with the Adelaide Sanchez award.

00:13:32 Gayle Phillips

Well, thank you. And I think, Commissioner Blinder, for nominating me and for the rest of the Commission and the mayor for, you know, you know, voting for that, it is quite an honor to receive that award.

00:13:45 Gayle Phillips

For me because.

00:13:45 Melissa Wissel

Maybe.

00:13:47 Gayle Phillips

I started out as a volunteer, as you said earlier, and I have had the pleasure really of being able to transition a museum that was just only open a small amount of time, help to preserve our building, but to go to where we have a professional staff that we're open seven days a week.

00:14:07 Gayle Phillips

That we have people coming from all over today. We are hosting diplomats from Iraq that are coming to our.

00:14:13 Melissa Wissel

Wow.

00:14:13 Gayle Phillips

Museum so they're coming through the State Department, so to be able to say that we have that from a small museum that is just like, you know, a really a community museum where we are telling the stories about Saint Augustine and St. John's County. But they have national impact and, you know, we have just received.

00:14:36 Gayle Phillips

The National Park Service African American.

00:14:40 Gayle Phillips

Network which is called ACORN, for that's their acronym and we have applied for a Reconstruction Era designation as well, which we have so much Reconstruction Era history. In Saint Augustine, you know the politicians who were here that lasted way beyond the official reconstruction.

00:15:00 Gayle Phillips

Umm.

00:15:01 Gayle Phillips

Official period of reconstruction and up until the early 1900s. So we have a lot of stories to tell, but the museum that you were talking about, it's not going to be a local museum. I want people to

understand that it is a state museum. It will tell the stories from all over the state of Florida, which are awesome, all those.

00:15:13 Melissa Wissel

Right, right.

00:15:21 Gayle Phillips

All those.

00:15:21 Gayle Phillips

Places that submitted applications, they all have wonderful stories, and they all need to be told and to be able to have those stories in a in a in a collective place is awesome. And I think that people will continue if you know if it is, if it ends up in Saint Augustine and they can come here and then it's kind of like it's it's focal.

00:15:31 Melissa Wissel

Face fear, right?

00:15:42 Gayle Phillips

So, they can go to other parts of this day and and, but first they can come to Saint Augustine and see the local history. That's right here as well within a, you know, a few short miles from that museum location. Well, thank you for everything that you do. Congratulations on the Adelaide Sanchez award.

00:15:43 Melissa Wissel

Other parts, right?

00:15:59 Melissa Wissel

And we will have you back another time to talk about all the great things going on at the museum. Great. Thanks. Thank you so much.

00:16:07 Melissa Wissel

If you missed part of this broadcast, you want to go back and listen from the beginning. You can check it out at citysanogradio.com. We have a list there. Of course we want you to hear everything that's happening in and around the city here and hear it from the people making it happen every day until next time. Thanks for tuning in.

00:16:23 Narrator

You've been listening to the break room, a weekly program addressing projects and programs offered by the City of Saint Augustine. Join us each week as the city's communications director, Melissa Whistle, has in-depth conversations with the people who make our town work to meet the needs of our community. See you at this time next week for another.

00:16:40 Narrator

Edition of the break room.