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Wreaths Across America seeking sponsors

By Chris Albrecht

Wreaths Across America is a grass-roots program that traces its beginning to 1992 when the Worcester Wreath Co. found itself with an excess of Christmas wreaths necessary to fill their orders. Owner Morrill Worcester shipped the excess wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery asking that they be placed on the headstones in an older, rarely visited part of the cemetery.

This gesture of appreciation and respect for America's Veterans was noticed, and today, veteran cemeteries across the country observe the 3rd Saturday of December as National Wreaths Across America Day. That falls on December 15th this year. At noon on this day, wreaths will be ceremoniously placed on veteran headstones in the Knoxville area's three veterans cemeteries by hundreds of

volunteers. The mission of Wreaths Across America is simple and much more than just decorating for Christmas: REMEMBER, HONOR and TEACH.

Knoxville's National Cemetery on Tyson St., next to the Old Gray Cemetery has 9,246 graves.

The East Tennessee State Veteran's Cemetery on Lyon's View Pike has approximately 5,000 graves. The East Tennessee

State Veteran's Cemetery in East Knox County on Gov. John Sevier Highway has about 2,500 graves, a number that is constantly increasing, as it is the currently active cemetery. Last year, only about 1/3 of the headstones in the three cemeteries were bedecked with a Christmas wreath. As already mentioned, this is a grassroots effort, there is no state or federal funding.

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Dave Wright Honored



The gavel Commissioner Wright used while chairman of the Knox County Commission was presented to him by the commission members. Wright was appointed to the commission in 2008 and served ten years representing the 8th District.

By Mike Steely
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Dave Wright, elected as state House District 19's representative, resigned from the Knox County Commission after twice serving as chairman. His ten years came to mind as he spoke to the commission last week.

"I still want to say it this way, 'My fellow commissioners,'" Representative-elect Wright said as he began to address the body.

"Tonight is really important to me. I

arrived at county commission during a time of controversy and turmoil," he said, adding, "and I am leaving Knox County Commission in a time of turmoil."

"But in the middle of all this in the Eighth District there's been library expansion, the senior citizens worked on and built the Senior Citizens Center, convenience centers built, updated traffic lights," he listed. "There have been hundreds of things that have worked out in the Eighth District."

"It's through organizations in the

Eighth District like churches, civic groups and regular old groups of people like the Republican Clubs that allowed the representation to come out of the Eighth District."

He recognized the efforts of various people in building Carter Elementary and Gibbs Middle Schools including Phil Ballard, Mike McMillan, Richard "Bud" Armstrong, Jack Huddleston and Steve Hunley.

"It's not been just me, it's taken all the

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Senior housing project gets city funding

By Mike Steely
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The City of Knoxville is finalizing steps to create 53 affordable housing units for low-income senior citizens. Tuesday's council meeting saw a series of actions toward that project beginning with the closure of a series of alleys.

Those authorizations to close the alleys led to the transfer of the property located at Clifton Road, Sanderson Road and Chillicothe to Knoxville's Housing Development Corporation at no charge.

The three-steps ended with the city council authorizing the award of \$1.2 million in Affordable Rental Development Funds to the Housing Development Corporation at the request of the Development Corporation.

The senior dwelling project will cost almost \$6 million with additional funding coming from state and federal sources. Senior residents who qualify as low-income recipients would pay 30% of their gross income and some would qualify for rent vouchers.

Planned for the area south of Western Avenue and east of I-640 in West Lonsdale, the project is "a no brainer" according to Knoxville's Community Development Corporation Director Ben Bentley. He added that thousands of senior citizens are on a waiting list for affordable housing.

The council also authorized spending \$500,000 for an art project for the little park at Summit Hill Road and South Gay Street. Requested by the office of redevelopment, the huge sculpture was selected from various submissions.

Liza Zenni, executive director of the Arts and Cultural Alliance, told the council that THEVERYMANY, LLC submission was selected because it will create a gathering place and is designed to "draw people in." She said the art sculpture will have places to sit, places for musicians to play and will transform the little area that has been called the "Country Music Park."

Councilman George Wallace asked if city engineers would approve of the structural integrity of the large sculpture and Chief Operating Officer David Brace said, "We're prepared to do that."

"We'll make sure it is safe," Brace said.

Zenni called the small park one of Knoxville's "forgotten places" and Councilwoman Gwen McKenzie said the design is

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Pension suit faces chancellor hearing Wednesday

By Mike Steely
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The Knox County Retirement and Pension Board met Monday, November 19, and adopted a policy for retirees allowing up to 43 days of unused vacation time to be and permitted within their retirement compensation.

In the midst of a court suit against the board and several recent retiring uniformed officers the board moved on as if the entire matter had been resolved. After swearing in Commissioner John Smith to replace Commissioner

John Schoonmaker the board voted to amend their policy to include the vacation days.

Uniformed officers will apparently continue to receive, upon full retirement, 75% of their pay, a three-percent increase each year, and the "cash out" payment of their unused vacation days over their final two years will be tacked onto their monthly retirement checks.

Law Director Richard "Bud" Armstrong had sued the pension board which had been adding

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PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY

Commissioner Randy Smith takes the oath for the Knox County Retirement and Pension from Attorney John Owings. Smith replaces Commissioner John Schoonmaker, who resigned from the board.

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