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News Release

Train re-dedication ceremony is 5:30 p.m. Oct. 24 at Wilson Park

Event moves to rotunda at 6 p.m. for video, hors d'oeuvres, free Arkalalah film

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (October 19, 2017) — The City of Arkansas City will be host to a special Arkalalah kickoff event that features a train unveiling and re-dedication Tuesday night at Wilson Park.

The first step in the Wilson Park Master Plan, the restoration of the park's famous train engine, has been occurring under a covered structure since late March. But now that work is drawing to a close.

"Thanks to the tireless efforts of the many skilled craftsmen who volunteered their skills for this project, we are pleased to be able to reopen the train to the public," said City Manager Nick Hernandez.

The re-dedication event will begin at 5:30 p.m. at the small gazebo in the southeast corner of the park, located at 701 N. Summit St. Several speakers will address those gathered to kick things off.

"We want to give people such as Carlla Pike, Rob Carroll, Brian Sanderholm, Randy Smith, Curtis Eaton, and especially Jeb Carroll and Kalin Taylor — without whom this project would not have been possible — a chance to talk about their experiences working on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore a beloved, historic piece of machinery to its past glory," Hernandez said.

Others who will be recognized include two steam locomotive engineers from Arkansas City and a Burlington Northern Santa Fe historical re-enactor, Mark R. Williams, who plans a special presentation.

Around 6 p.m., there will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony and photo opportunity. The train's new steam whistle will be sounded to commemorate the occasion and also to kick off the 2017 Arkalalah festivities.

After the ceremony, the event will move west to the rotunda for a short video presentation showing parts of the restoration process. The Wilson Park Master Plan flythrough video also will be shown again.

There will be a small reception following the video. Light hors d'oeuvres and punch will be served.

For immediate release

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The 2017 Arkalalah Festival will begin formally at 7 p.m. with the next installment of the Fall Family Movie Series — a special showing of the John Candy comedy classic, “The Great Outdoors,” sponsored by the Arkalalah Executive Committee in honor of this year’s Arkalalah theme of the same name.

In this PG-rated film that also stars Dan Aykroyd, a Chicago man’s hope for a peaceful family vacation in the woods is shattered when his annoying in-laws drop in for a visit.

Admission is free. Seating is limited, so attendees are advised to bring lawn chairs or blankets.

About the Wilson Park Master Plan

Since the inception of the V.J. Wilkins Memorial Foundation, Wilson Park has been identified as a central community gathering point that is crucial to the cultural and artistic life of the Ark City community.

The Wilkins Foundation’s investment in the park began early in 2014. The movie projection equipment, sound system and V.J. Wilkins Memorial Stage at the Wilson Park rotunda all were made possible by a grant received in 2014 from the foundation, in order to promote arts throughout the city.

In 2015, the City of Arkansas City was awarded a \$33,500 grant from the Wilkins Foundation to develop a master plan for Wilson Park and the vacant City-owned lot just to the north.

The scope of the plan included looking at the potential for a cultural events center and possibly expanding the park into the recently vacated hospital property at Birch Avenue and First Street.

A steering committee of citizens and affiliated representatives was formed to direct the process.

The Wilson Park Master Plan steering committee members were:

- City Commissioner Charles Tweedy III — originally appointed as a planning commissioner;
- Jill Wineinger — Arkansas City Beautification and Tree Advisory Board vice chair;
- Pam Crain — Arkansas City Convention and Visitors Bureau tourism specialist;
- Kristi Old and Brittany Carder — Arkansas City Farm and Art Market coordinators;
- Blanche Schmidt — Arkansas City Public Library Board of Trustees president;
- Angie Bruce, Richard Hensley and Dr. Nick Rogers — citizens at large.

Also present at most of the meetings were V.J. Wilkins Foundation board members Otis Morrow and Karen Zeller, as well as Hernandez and Public Information Officer Andrew Lawson.

LK Architecture, of Wichita, was retained by the City to assist with developing the master plan and related materials. The architects who worked on the project were Jeff Best, director of landscape architecture; Aaron Smith, design architect; and William Wells, landscape architect.

The steering committee met four times in 2015 — on Sept. 29, Oct. 14, Nov. 2 and Dec. 7 — to discuss and develop the master plan. The plan was finalized at a meeting June 6, 2016, for presentation to the Wilkins Foundation last July in Denver, Colorado. A rollout planning meeting was held March 13.

The Wilson Park Master Plan was rolled out throughout March and April at a variety of community events, including the 2017 Outdoor Friday Family Movie Series, Arbor Day, Cowley's Outdoor Market, the Cowley County Health and Safety Fair, and an Arkansas City Area Chamber of Commerce coffee.

To generate momentum for the project, the City has initiated the Friends of Wilson Park, a special fund residing with Legacy Regional Community Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit based in Winfield.

V.J. Wilkins Challenge Grant details

The V.J. Wilkins Foundation Challenge Grant of \$500,000 is contingent on the City and/or other private donors providing matching dollars toward the advancement of the Wilson Park Master Plan.

The grant is contingent on matching funds, but could result in up to \$1 million being invested to kick off the plan if the full \$500,000 can be matched. The City of Arkansas City's goal is to raise \$1 million.

Without confirmation of this achievement or documentation of sufficient efforts being expended to meet the Challenge Grant, the Challenge Grant will expire July 1, 2018.

"We are extremely grateful to the V.J. Wilkins Foundation and Board of Trustees for their support of this important community project since the very beginning," Hernandez said. "This grant is both a gift and a challenge, but it is a challenge I am confident Arkansas City will rise to meet."

If the Challenge Grant is achieved, funds will be disbursed in equal amounts no later than calendar years 2019 and 2020. If other applications for funding for 2017 and 2018 do not materialize, the Wilkins Foundation may provide funding earlier than in the years originally identified.

The foundation has requested memorializing this gift with naming rights associated with the splash pad and the Farm and Art Market, on an appropriate plaque identifying the foundation as initiating the funding for the Wilson Park Master Plan renovation project.

About Friends of Wilson Park

Legacy Regional Community Foundation accepts cash, checks and credit or debit cards. Payments may be made online at www.legacyregionalfoundation.org/Donations or mailed to Legacy Foundation, P.O. Box 701, Arkansas City, KS 67005.

Checks should be made payable to Legacy Foundation with “Friends of Wilson Park” indicated on the check’s memo line. Donations may be made to individual components of the Master Plan, if so desired. This also should be noted in the check’s memo field. (See next section for further details.)

Legacy also can set up payment plans for donations that span up to three years, with reminders. It also will provide receipts that validate the tax-exempt status of any donations to Friends of Wilson Park.

Park donors will be recognized and thanked publicly on the Friends of Wilson Park Facebook page at www.facebook.com/WilsonParkFriends, unless they specifically request to remain anonymous.

Funds donated for specific portions of the Wilson Park Master Plan will be disbursed to the City only as each portion of the plan enters the planning and construction phase.

Master Plan components and committees

For those interested in donating to only a portion of the Wilson Park Master Plan, rather than the overall fund, the following options are available — please indicate preferred portion(s) on memo line:

Phase 0 — nearing completion

- **Train Improvements** — fundraising target: \$109,000.

Phase 1 (Challenge Grant) — total fundraising target: \$1 million

- **Farm and Art Market;**
- **Restrooms;**
- **Rotunda Improvements;**
- **Splash Pad or Interactive Fountain.**

Phase 2

- **Memorial Garden or Peace Garden** — fundraising target: \$366,000;
- **Playground** — fundraising target: \$872,000.

Phase 3

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- **Events Center** — fundraising target: \$4.5 million.

Phase 4

- **Library Expansion** — fundraising target: \$2 million.

The following committees are in the process of being formed and applications can still be submitted:

- Fundraising Committee
- Peace Garden Design Committee
- Playground Design Committee
- Public Art Advisory Committee
- Splash Pad Design Committee

To apply for a committee, pick up a Wilson Park Master Plan brochure in the Utility Billing Office at City Hall, located at 118 W. Central Ave., and return it to Lawson.

The brochure and accompanying volunteer interest form also can be found online and downloaded or printed at www.arkansascityks.gov/Government/Parks/Master-Plan-Brochure.pdf. Interest in a particular committee also may be submitted by email to alawson@arkansascityks.gov.

“We urge people to let us know soon on which committees they would like to serve,” Lawson said.

About the Outdoor Friday Family Movie Series

The 2015 Outdoor Summer Movie Series was a huge success in the debut season for the new V.J. Wilkins Memorial Stage at the rotunda, with particularly large crowds viewing “Big Hero 6” and “Frozen.”

The projection equipment, sound system and stage all were made possible by a grant received three years ago from the V.J. Wilkins Memorial Foundation, in order to promote arts throughout the city.

A special fall showing of “Inside Out” drew more than 300 people to the rotunda in November 2015, despite colder temperatures. Plans were launched then for more autumn showings in 2016 and 2017.

Various weather conditions impacted attendance often last spring and summer, but the season’s highlight undoubtedly was in June 2016, when more than 700 people packed Paris Park Pool for a special doubleheader, consisting of “Finding Nemo” and “Jaws,” during a free swim-in night at the pool.

The sequel event, featuring “Finding Dory,” drew more than 500 visitors to the pool on July 21, 2017.

During the last three years, the City of Arkansas City has shown a wide variety of movies, including:

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- '80s classics — “Back to the Future,” “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off,” “Ghostbusters,” “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” and “Three Amigos!”
- Classic Disney films — “The Fox and the Hound,” “The Jungle Book,” “Mary Poppins” and “Pete’s Dragon”
- Disney animated features — “Big Hero 6,” “Frozen,” “Moana” and “Zootopia”
- Disney live-action remakes — “Cinderella” and “Maleficent”
- Disney-Pixar animated collaborations — “Finding Dory,” “Finding Nemo,” “The Good Dinosaur” and “Inside Out”
- Marvel Cinematic Universe films — “Doctor Strange,” “Guardians of the Galaxy” and “Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2”
- Other animated films — “The Lego Batman Movie,” “The Lego Movie,” “The Lorax,” “Minions,” “The Secret Life of Pets” and “Sing”
- Star Wars movies — “Rogue One: A Star Wars Story,” “Star Wars: A New Hope” and “Star Wars: The Force Awakens”
- Summer and holiday blockbusters — “Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them,” “Jaws,” “Jurassic Park,” “Jurassic World,” “Monster Trucks” and “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows”

The Outdoor Friday Family Movie Series only has been possible with the assistance of many generous donors, including:

- Civic and service clubs such as the Arkansas City High School KAY Club, the Kiwanis Club, and the Optimists and Soroptimists of Arkansas City;
- Local businesses such as Ark City Daily Bytes, Ark Valley Credit Union, Community National Bank & Trust, Elite Advertising, Grass Clippings, Mitch Reichle—Farm Bureau Financial Services, Munson Insurance, Plumber Bob’s, RCB Bank, Reedy Ford, Rogers Family Dentistry, The Stock Exchange Bank, Union State Bank, and WB Meats;
- Governmental entities such as the Arkansas City Convention and Visitors Bureau, Arkansas City Public Library, and City of Arkansas City;
- Nonprofit organizations such as the Arkalalah Executive Committee, the Arkansas City Area Chamber of Commerce, the Fraternal Order of Police, Newkirk (Oklahoma) Main Street, Newman’s Quest and the Young Professionals of Cowley County.

For more information on becoming a sponsor for an upcoming movie, call Lawson at (620) 441-4415 or email alawson@arkansascityks.gov.

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