

# What changes are coming to Phillis Wheatley?

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(Photo: Angelia Davis/STAFF)

The Phillis Wheatley Association is approaching its 99th birthday in 2018 with a new partner, new programs and new plans for a building makeover.

Construction has started at its lower building. The roof and the HVAC system in the gym will soon be replaced. Upgrades to the electrical system and “a remake of the entire facility” are also part of the plan following a partnership between the Phillis Wheatley Association and Greenville County Rec.

“Nobody does recreation better than the county so what a perfect match to have two strong organizations come together to serve the greater good of Greenville,” said Pastor Darian Blue, executive director of the Phillis

Wheatley Association.

The Phillis Wheatley Association and the county have a history of working together, said Shannon Herman, assistant administrator for Greenville County. She said the organization has also been working closely with County Council, specifically council members Xanthene Norris and Ennis Fant.

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“The county is really great at running recreational programs, summer programming, after-school programming and senior programming,” Herman said. “We saw an opportunity to come in and do something that we do well, and free up Phillis Wheatley to concentrate on some of their really cool programming attributes such as the repertory theatre.”

The upgrades at the Phillis Wheatley Community Center could be complete by summer 2018. Blue said he feels like the facility “has been saved.”

Greenville County Rec will assume responsibility for the summer camp, the after-school program and a senior program at Phillis Wheatley, he said.

While the county takes over recreation, the Phillis Wheatley Association will oversee academic programs, infusing them with STEAM (Science, Technology, Entrepreneurship, Arts and Math).

The association plans to offer new programs, including a leadership program for minority-led nonprofit organizations.

The association will celebrate its 100th birthday in 2019. Part of the celebration includes plans to redesign the center. Funds are being raised for the makeover, Blue said.

A new “state-of-the-art” kitchen will enable the association to launch a culinary arts program.

"We'll be putting a dent in this whole idea that this community is a food desert," Blue said. "Kids will be able to come to a brand new culinary arts kitchen where they'll learn how to prepare healthy meals."

Adults will also be able to go through the kitchen and learn skills to "become employable to all of the restaurants throughout downtown Greenville.

"Now you're talking about job placement, ending the cycle of poverty through that kitchen and that cafeteria," Blue said.

Blue said two groups within the Diversity Leadership Institute have raised approximately \$40,000 to transform the kitchen into "a top culinary arts kitchen."

He said the association is also getting help in this endeavor from Greenville restaurant owner Rick Erwin, Michelin North America, the Greenville Health System and others.

Blue said the collaboration between the association and the county is an opportunity for the 200-plus children that daily attend the center to have something nice, something they deserve.

"They go to other places and see nice stuff, including roofs with no leaks, he said.

Now, they'll have it in their own community, Blue said.

The association's community center at 40 John McCarroll Way has, for years now, been showing its age. Blue said the center was having age-related issues when he began leading the organization five years ago.

In 2014, he spent five days in a tent on the roof of the building trying to raise money for the repairs and to keep the building sustainable.

"Maybe they thought Phillis Wheatley was just some run down place that wasn't doing nothing," he said. "I beg to differ, our students would beg to differ, and 95 percent of our parents would beg to differ."

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