

# **‘Week of Hope’ Brings National Recognition to Manassas** *City Program Wins Three National Awards*

## **National 2009 Neighborhood Program of the Year, Second Place**

## **National 2009 Neighborhood of the Year, Second Place (with Weems Neighborhood Watch)**

## **Outstanding Achievement in Local Government Innovation**

MANASSAS, VA—The City of Manassas’ Neighborhood Services has been selected to receive three national awards for its Week of Hope Program.

The first award, Outstanding Achievement in Local Government Innovation, was presented to Neighborhood Services Manager Kisha Wilson-Sogunro on May 14 during the 2009 Transforming Local Government Conference held in Corpus Christi, Texas. The competition is sponsored by Alliance for Innovation, a networking association for cities and counties committed to innovation and transforming local governments. The City of Manassas is an Alliance member.

The second and third awards, “National 2009 Neighborhood Program of the Year, Second Place,” and “National 2009 Neighborhood of the Year, Second Place” (awarded to Weems Neighborhood Watch for their Landgreen Street Cleanup during Week of Hope) were presented on May 21-23 in Spokane, Washington at the National Conference on Neighborhood Concerns.

The City of Manassas competed against 12 neighborhood programs, including the Alhambra Graffiti Busters of Phoenix, Arizona; Watts Gang Task Force of Los Angeles, California, and Crime Watchers in Fort Worth, Texas, to win the two second place national awards.

In addition, Wilson-Sogunro is bringing home three national “NUSA Notables” awards for her community partners who contributed substantially to the Week of Hope program: J.E. Rice True Value Hardware, Grill ‘N’ Kabob Pizza and Dunkin’ Donuts.

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Wilson-Sogunro represented the City of Manassas at the conference with a two-hour workshop presentation on “Doing More with Less through Creative Partnerships.” She is scheduled to give the same presentation at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Virginia Statewide Neighborhood Conference in Chesterfield County on September 24-26, 2009.

The Week of Hope program brought the City statewide recognition with three awards last fall: State Neighborhood Project of the Year (with Weems Neighborhood Watch), State Neighborhood Youth Individual Effort of the Year (Michael Sensale) and State Neighborhood Youth Group Effort of the Year.

Week of Hope brings hundreds of volunteers to the City of Manassas each summer to energize and inspire locals to join the show of force that knocks out chronically needed cleanup and renovation projects. In the process, the City identifies neighborhood leaders, builds partnerships and motivates citizens to get to know their neighbors and resolve neighborhood challenges themselves. According to Virginia Office of Volunteerism calculations, 900 Week of Hope volunteers saved the City of Manassas \$142,244 in man-hours last summer.

### **Tool Drive for Youth in Georgetown South Kicks Off This Year’s Program**

The City’s Neighborhood Services is currently seeking partners for this year’s summer-long Week of Hope program, June 13-August 1. The program kicks off with “Bring a Tool Sunday” on June 14 at Trinity Episcopal Church, 9325 West Street in Old Town Manassas. Trinity Episcopal Church is helping local real estate developer Cliff Barney collect new and used yard tools so that youth in Georgetown South who want to earn money doing yard work this summer can do so. These ambitious youth have already been doing yard work and trash removal at several rental houses. Barney is willing to oversee this project and train the youth on tool safety and basic grounds-keeping. Donations of new or used tools, anything from lawn mowers to work gloves, can be left at the church until 4 p.m. on June 14.

“In a time when local governments are cutting programs to meet their budgets, Week of Hope gives instead of takes,” explains Kisha Wilson-Sogunro. “The program models neighbors helping neighbors with the support of businesses, faith organizations and community groups.”

### **Public Invited to May 30 Neighborhood Action Forum at GMU-Prince William**

Also, on Saturday, May 30 from 8:30 am until noon, the City of Manassas is hosting an Action Forum that is the culmination of the City’s pilot Neighborhood Improvement Circles – the bridge between the City’s Neighborhood Conference last November, and Week of Hope this summer. The Action Forum will take place at George Mason University’s Prince William Campus in Bull Run Hall, Room 130, 10900 University Boulevard in Manassas. Admission is free and so is parking in the King Lot. Coffee and pastries will be provided. Participants will meet those who took part in the Georgetown South, Lindendale, Point of Woods/Cannon Ridge, Weems, Wellington, Westgate, Wildwood and pilot cross-community circles, and will be able to share action ideas and participate in the next steps for improving all neighborhoods. The action forum is open to the public, so inviting others and bringing guests is encouraged. RSVP to Kisha Sogunro at 703-257-8200 or Cindy Brookshire 703-361-6941 or register online at [www.pwsc.org](http://www.pwsc.org).

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### **Weems Neighborhood Watch wins Second Place and \$300 in National Competition for 2009 Neighborhood of the Year**

A national second place award was presented to Weems Neighborhood Watch, one of six neighborhood watches in the City of Manassas, Virginia, at the National Conference on Neighborhood Concerns in Spokane, Washington on May 22, is for their Landgreen Street Cleanup last June 23-26, partnering with volunteers from the 12-street Weems Neighborhood Watch area, the Week of Hope, several Osbourn High School students and Manassas Cab Company’s general manager, Robert Johnson.

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The out-of-town volunteers came from Church of the Redeemer in Gaithersburg, Maryland; McLean Presbyterian Church in McLean, Virginia; Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Warrenton, Virginia and Boone's Creek Christian Church in Jonesboro, Tennessee.

Watch member Cindy Brookshire explained that they chose Landgreen Street because Manassas Cab driver Khawaja Ahmed was murdered there in February 2008. In June 2008, Landgreen Street had six vacant houses with debris and tall grass, trash throughout the neighborhood and several occupied homes that were reported for tall grass. The goals for the project were: 1) to show the watch's presence in the neighborhood as a crime deterrent, 2) to abate the blight that had demoralized the neighborhood and 3) to bring together neighbors with volunteers to solve a problem and, in the process, build community. Weems Neighborhood Watch ended the cleanup with Landgreen Street residents and volunteers at a "party in the park" with ice cream and homemade cookies at Byrd Park. Weems Neighborhood Watch currently has 101 members, and is planning more community projects this summer.

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***For media inquiries, contact: Kisha Wilson-Sogunro, 703-257-8240. Photos of the award presentation in Spokane and the Week of Hope/Landgreen Street Cleanup are available on request.***