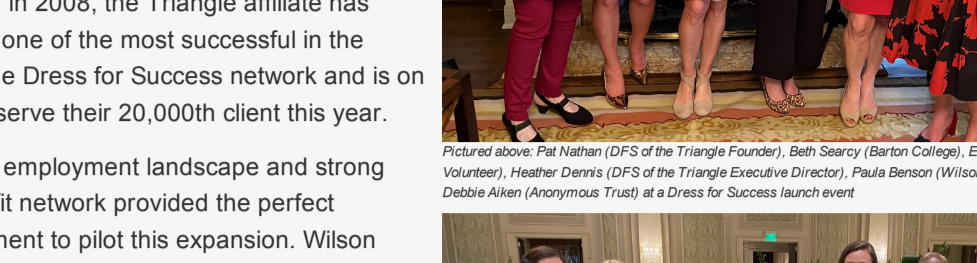




[VISIT OUR WEBSITE TODAY](#)

## Creating Opportunities To Empower Local Women and Strengthen the Wilson Workforce

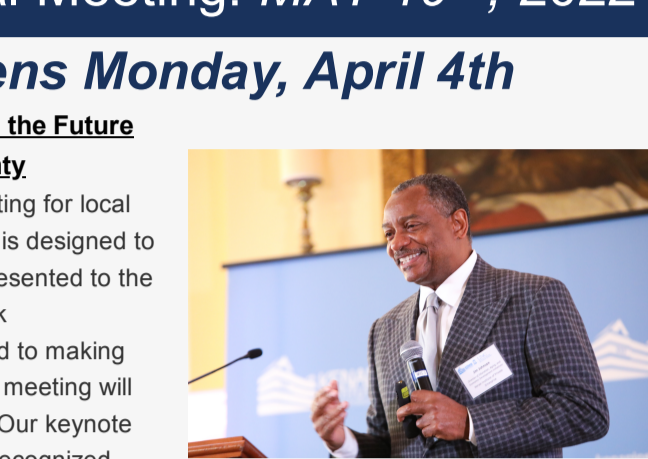


Wilson Forward is pleased to announce that Dress for Success Triangle, a non-profit that provides career and image coaching services to unemployed and underemployed women, is launching a pilot program in the Wilson community. The mission of Dress for Success is to provide women with a network of support, professional attire, and development tools to help them thrive in work and in life. Since its founding in 2008, the Triangle affiliate has become one of the most successful in the worldwide Dress for Success network and is on track to serve their 20,000th client this year.



*Pictured above: Pat Nathan (DPS of the Triangle Founder), Beth Searcy (Barton College), Ella Franz (DPS Volunteer), Heather Dennis (DPS of the Triangle Executive Director), Paula Benson (Wilson Forward), and Debbie Aiken (Anonymous Trust) at a Dress for Success launch event*

Wilson's employment landscape and strong non-profit network provided the perfect environment to pilot this expansion. Wilson Forward serves as a connector for local organizations and leaders to work collaboratively, but we also serve as a connection to opportunities and investments that are dependent on strong collaboration.



*Pictured above: Mahalia Witter-Melithew (Casta Brewing), Beth Searcy (Barton College), Paula Benson (Wilson Forward), Paige Chesson (Wilson Medical), Christy Proctor (Chick-Fil-A), Cameron Cochran (Wilson Forward), Eulanda Thorne (Ms. Black North Carolina), and Boosie Harris (Wilson Forward) at the Dress for Success Annual Gala*

The unique relationships of Wilson partners have played a pivotal role in laying the foundation for a successful launch. Among the services offered, the Going Places Network (a job acquisition program) will be offered in partnership with Wilson Community College beginning in April.

Heather Dennis, Executive Director of the agency, says the expansion East has been something the organization has been wanting to do for a few years. "We are so grateful to have received funding from a Triangle based foundation so that we could pilot career services, evaluate their success, and then determine the next steps in the future. Additionally, Wilson Forward has been instrumental in introducing us to key partners and helping us navigate important networks. This is an exciting time for us as we look forward to serving women in Wilson and the Eastern part of the state."

[Learn More About the Dress for Success Here](#)

## Wilson Forward Annual Meeting: MAY 19TH, 2022

### Registration Opens Monday, April 4th

#### Gale Force Demographic Wind Gusts and the Future Competitiveness of Wilson County

Each year, Wilson Forward hosts an Annual Meeting for local partners and community members. This meeting is designed to focus on specific challenges and opportunities presented to the Wilson community while also highlighting the work of partnerships and collaborative efforts dedicated to making Wilson a great place to work and live. This year's meeting will focus on the data provided by the 2020 census. Our keynote speaker will be Dr. James Johnson, a nationally recognized expert in understanding the economic impact of demographic changes.



*Pictured above: Dr. James Johnson, Wilson Forward Annual Meeting keynote speaker*

Dr. Johnson is the William R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor of strategy and entrepreneurship and director of the Urban Investment Strategies Center at the Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise. His research interests include community and economic development, the effects of demographic changes on the U.S. workplace, urban poverty and public policy in urban America, and workforce diversity issues.

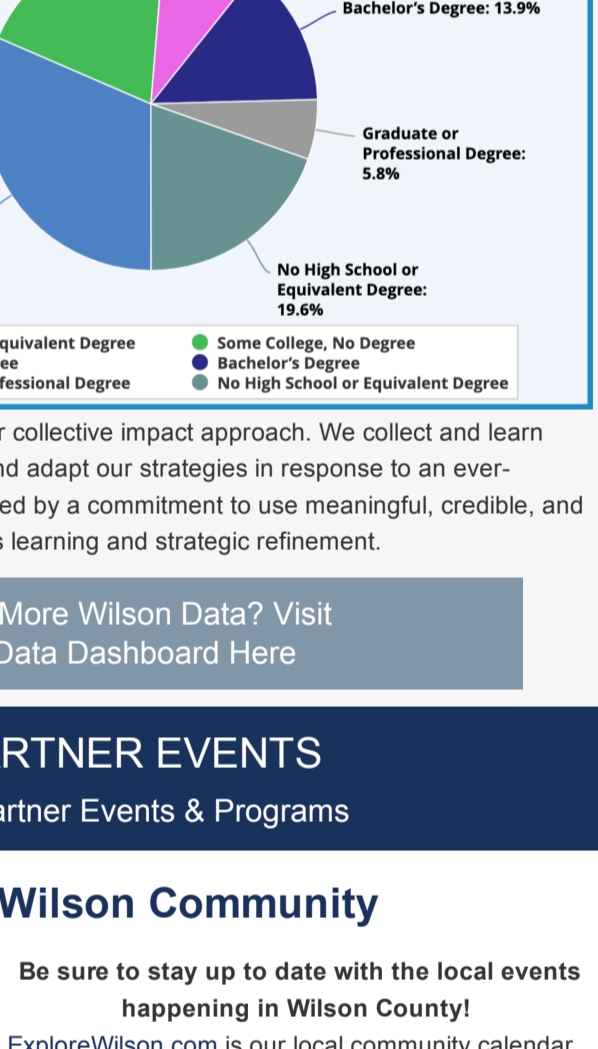
[Click Here for More Information About Past Wilson Forward Annual Meetings](#)

## Highlighting Local Partnerships to Improve Community Health

After two years of gathering virtually, Wilson Wellness Collaborative (WWC) partners met on March 24 for the first in-person meeting since February 2020. Along with the celebration of being together and connecting with partners in-person, the group received several updates and presentations of ongoing projects in the community that were established in the WWC community health plan created in 2019. We are grateful to our local leaders who shared information with the group. Their discussions provided insight on the Wilson workforce, early education efforts, connecting our community with resources through 211, substance misuse grants, an eviction diversion pilot program, school-based health centers, the Middle School After School Program, and the upcoming Community Health Needs Assessment. Partners also heard from Megan Eilenberger, Director of Programs for Dress for Success of the Triangle, about opportunities available for partnership and programming through Wilson's Dress for Success pilot program. The Wilson Wellness Collaborative (WWC) represents a cross-sector collaboration of over 90 community partners committed to the improvement of health and wellness in Wilson County. Wilson Forward serves as a facilitator to this collaboration to connect diverse resources, experiences, and leadership to the structure and implementation of a holistic approach to community health.



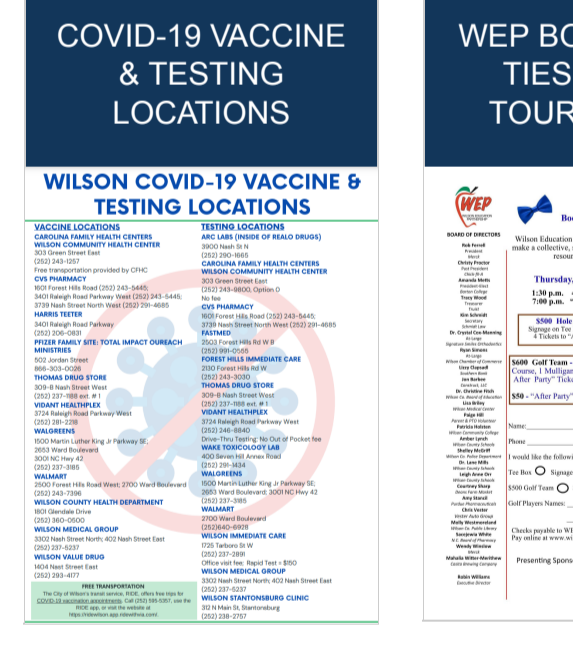
*Pictured above: WWC meeting presenters Judi Thurston (United Way), Candice Rountree (Wilson Co. DSS), Teresa Ellen (Wilson Co. Health Dept.), Megan Eilenberger (DPS of the Triangle), Edwin Lucas (Wilson Family YMCA), Ryan Simons (Chamber of Commerce)*



*Pictured above: The March 24th Wilson Wellness Collaborative Meeting*

[Learn More About the Wilson Wellness Collaborative Here](#)

## Connecting Ideas and Leadership Across NC



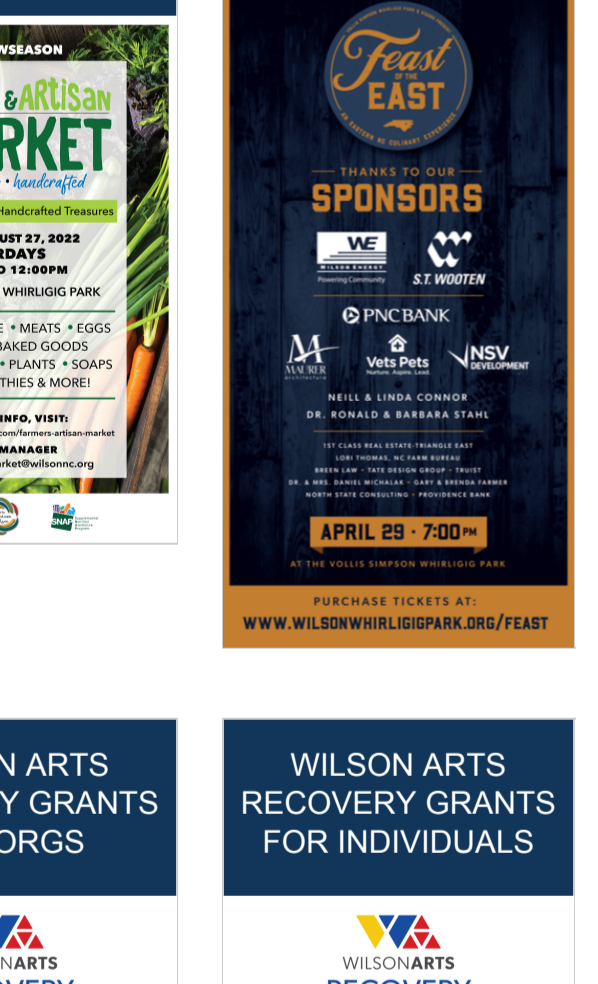
*Pictured above: Paula Benson (Wilson Forward), Patrick Woodie (NC Rural Center), Cameron Cochran (Wilson Forward), and Dante Pittman (City of Wilson)*

#### Connecting with NC Rural Leaders

Wilson Forward attended the 2022 NC Rural Center Summit earlier this month. The conference provided two full days of celebrating rural communities, reconnecting with friends, and moving towards a stronger tomorrow with inspiring speakers, informative workshops, and rural champions from across NC. We are always eager to share the incredible work happening in the Wilson community while learning from other leaders in our state who are committed to rural NC and moving towards building a stronger tomorrow.

#### Politics, Policy, and a New Economic Strategy for Rural North Carolina

Executive Director Paula Benson joined Rodger Lentz (City Planner, City of Wilson), Will Aycock (General Manager, Greenlight), and Jennifer Lantz (Executive Director, WEDC) at the Politics, Policy, and a New Economic Strategy for Rural North Carolina Conference at Duke University. The Wilson leaders joined scholars, practitioners, and advocates to take stock of the current economic and political landscape, consider what a new economic strategy for rural North Carolina could look like, and consider the policy changes necessary to provide national leadership on rural economic renewal. Themes highlighted in the sessions included rural identity, access to broadband, political organization, and the local example of partnerships and collaborations in Wilson, North Carolina. Wilson offers a powerful case study for successful investment in rural communities, and the group provided insight into Wilson's journey and the revitalization efforts that have contributed to its being described as "the next innovation hub in North Carolina."

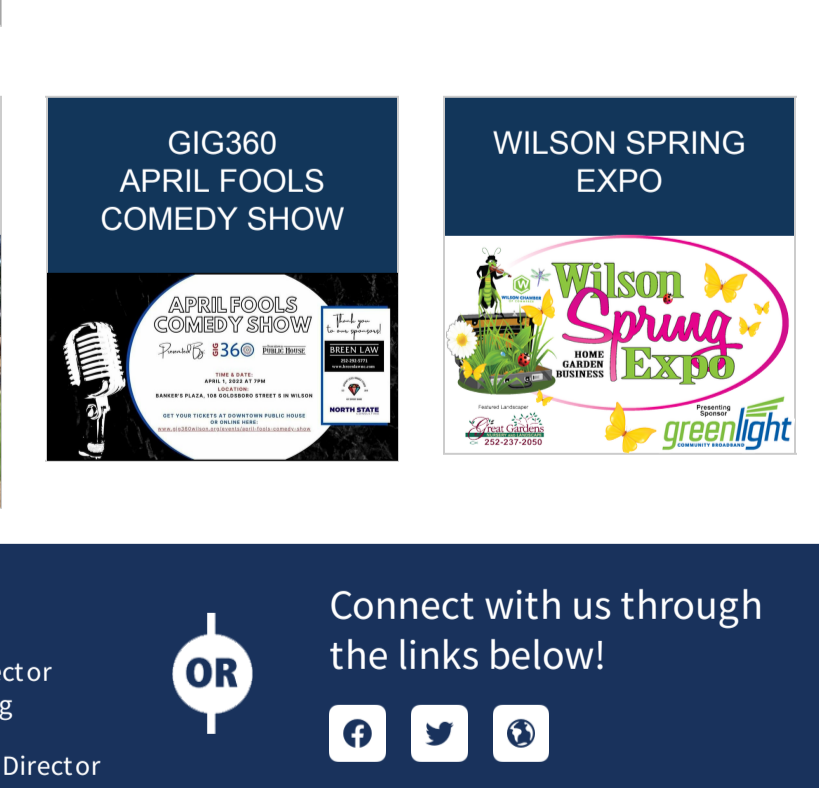


*Pictured above: Jennifer Lantz (Wilson EDC), Paula Benson (Wilson Forward), Rodger Lentz (City of Wilson), Will Aycock (Greenlight)*

## Did You Know?

### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN WILSON COUNTY

High School Graduates include persons 25 years old and over whose highest degree is a high school diploma or its equivalent. People who reported completing the 12th grade but not receiving a diploma are not included. Persons with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher are those 25 years old and over who have received a bachelor's degree from a college or university, or a master's, professional, or doctorate degree.



Wilson Forward's use of data is a core element of our collective impact approach. We collect and learn from data so that we can openly share information and adapt our strategies in response to an ever-changing environment. Our partnerships are sustained by a commitment to use meaningful, credible, and useful qualitative and quantitative data for continuous learning and strategic refinement.

[Interested in Exploring More Wilson Data? Visit the Wilson Forward Data Dashboard Here](#)

## COMMUNITY PARTNER EVENTS

Upcoming Community Partner Events & Programs

### A Calendar for the Wilson Community

Be sure to stay up to date with the local events happening in Wilson County!  
[ExploreWilson.com](#) is our local community calendar where you can find all of Wilson's events. Explore Wilson represents a collaboration of multiple community partners to provide a community calendar supported by a coalition of local organizations that have a shared commitment to promoting events that add to Wilson's cultural and economic identity. Community members and groups can add qualifying public events on the calendar for free at any time! Guidelines for qualifying events may be found on the website.

[Explore Wilson Here](#)

Please contact us with any questions or inquiries  
Paula Benson, Executive Director  
PBenson@WilsonForward.org



Connect with us through the links below!



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CCochran@WilsonForward.org

