WASHINGTON, GEORGIA

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WASHINGTON

Part of the New Prosperity

Nestled smack in the middle of the soon-to-be expanded stretch of Highway 78 between the important Athens and Augusta corridor, Washington is capitalizing on its cultural and natural resources to lure new visitors and residents to the state’s oldest county.

Following in the footsteps of Margo and Alfred Moses who cut one of the first ever plastic garments in the world in Wilkes County in 1946, local industries Berry Global and Novipax are innovating in plastics and packaging solutions. Canfor will soon unveil an $120 million advanced technology sawmill in Washington, strategically located next to its glulam facility.

With the cyber security industry bringing new growth to the east and Athens’ continued growth to the west, Washington is moving ahead to be part of the area’s economic development success story. The city’s staff is earning grant money, supplementing its electric enterprise revenue with strategic partnerships and other resources to ensure prosperity.
FAST FACTS
WASHINGTON

POPULATION: 3,978
WILKES COUNTY: 9,867

UTILITIES: Electricity, water, sanitation, and solid waste

TRANSPORTATION: 22 minutes north of I-20; 4-laning underway of US-I /SR-17
Halfway between Athens (University of Georgia) and Augusta
Short line rail service
Washington-Wilkes County Airport

NOTABLE EMPLOYERS:
• Berry Global – Plastics
• Canfor – Lumber products
• Novipax – Packaging
• Southern H Forest Products – Lumber products
• Wills Memorial Hospital – Healthcare
• Department of Juvenile Justice – Youth Detention Center

“I am interested in government at the speed of business.”
Mayor Barnett

WASHINGTON FIRSTS:
• First city in the nation to be established in the name of George Washington, 1780.
• First successful cotton gin perfected and set up by Eli Whitney in Wilkes county, 1795.
• First woman newspaper editor in U.S. was Sarah Hillhouse who became the editor of The Monitor in 1804 (inducted into Georgia Women of Achievement in 2006).
• First cotton mill in Georgia erected on Upton Creek in Wilkes County, 1811.
• First stamp mill for gold in the world was invented and put into use near Washington by Jeremiah Griffin, 1831-1832.
• First free public library in the State of Georgia.
• First graduate of the African-American School of Nursing, 1887.
Making a New History

Make History Here proudly emblazons a crisp white City of Washington community business card, an invitation to join the impressive litany of the city’s historical firsts. It’s a reminder that city leaders and staff aren’t resting on their laurels but preparing a path for the next generation of history makers in the east central Georgia town of just under 4000.

Mayor Ames Barnett is a perfect example of what all of rural Georgia wishes for its native sons and daughters; come home. Barnett went away to college but came back to run the family business and play a part in local leadership. He underscores the challenge of making history here and encourages businesses and citizens to come and make an impact. City Administrator Sherri Bailey has been carrying out the vision to catalyze positive change in the area.

Bailey listens as her energetic staff boasts about the recently renovated town square and the outdoor movie nights and skates around the square made possible by the new greenspace. It has become a central gathering place for everyone. “Once, we couldn’t see across the street,” she says gesturing past the town’s central square to the gym and restaurants on the other side. “Overgrown shrubbery masked everything.”

Elizabeth Elliott, Main Street Coordinator, points to the south end, newly planted and hardscaped to highlight the square’s only memorial and a significant first for the town. In 2012, Washington-Wilkes County progressed beyond the national debate on honoring Confederate veterans with monuments and became among the first to memorialize the African American fighters of the American Revolution. The representative bust of Washington-native Austin Dabney reminds visitors of the contribution African Americans played in securing freedom for all in our nation. Congress may soon add to the National Mall in the “other Washington” a monument dedicated to those of African descent who joined the other patriots.

From Community Building to Place Making

“Preservation is another important given here,” says Janet Parker, the newly appointed Director of Historic Properties. “I think we are a standout in our commitment to holding it as a community value.” As curator and caretaker for the three city-owned museums, Parker looks for ways for guests to live the city’s rich history or play the part of historian.

Staff member Elliott, also a trained preservationist, warns guests not to be so intrigued by the history they miss the area’s recreational opportunities. Paddle blue trails on the Broad and Little Rivers, catch some fish or take a trail ride at Holliday Park, or book a cottage at one of the two lakeside state parks within half an hour of downtown.

Looking Inward to Grow Outward

With a motivated team of talent and more, Washington is again poised to attract history makers into its fold and remind its peers that those communities best prepared for the future will indeed make history.
The historic Gordon Street School, once slated for demolition, is being redeveloped as a joint project by the city and the Urban Redevelopment Authority. The old practice field is now a community garden, the coaches’ office a tool shed. After saving the school’s main halls from demolition, a community group is working to preserve the area’s African American history. A DCA grant funded site preparation for a potential assisted living development towards the rear of the property.

During the Revolutionary War times, 360 Patriots defeated over 800 Loyalists at the Battle of Kettle Creek, freeing Georgia from the British stronghold.

Today Washington lodgers at the historic Fitzpatrick Hotel can practice yoga on the square and sit down to a grain bowl for lunch at the neighboring cafe.

Washington boasts an impressive collection of antebellum homes and the Tiffany window inset in the warm brick of the Mary Willis Library.

South Carolina blade smith, John Moran, was drawn to Washington by the restored 56-acre Callaway Plantation. Not just the 1785 log cabin or 1840s slave cabin or the Greek Revival-style “Big House,” Moran was charmed by the blacksmith shop. Since stumbling into the shop, Moran has been volunteering his time to revive the old coal forge and dust off some hammers and anvils to bring the shop back up to use. The efforts will culminate with a knife-making class where novice makers will walk away with a usable “Callaway Frontier Knife.”