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Gwinnett names fire chief | Assistant Chief Knick to succeed retiring Snyder

BY ISABEL HUGHES
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After nearly 30 years of service to Gwinnett County, Fire Chief Casey Snyder is stepping down.

On Wednesday, county administrator Glenn Stephens announced that Assistant Fire Chief Russell Knick will succeed Snyder, who is retiring after five years as chief.

Knick, a 24-year veteran of the Gwinnett County Department of Fire and Emergency Services, will

assume his new role May 6. He is expected to announce additional promotions to fill other key leadership positions in upcoming weeks.

"Under Casey's watch, the department received international accreditation from the Center for Public Safety Excellence and the county's ISO classification rating improved from a four to a two," Stephens said. "If these accomplishments weren't enough, the department also opened a new fire training facility, Fire Station 31, Maxwell High School Training

Tower and relocated Fire Stations 10 and 15. I wish Casey the best in his well-deserved retirement."

In his tenure as fire chief, Snyder focused on increasing recruit training to the paramedic level and adding medical units to all stations. The department's paramedic program was also reaccredited by the Committee on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs during his time.

With county commission and

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Outgoing Fire Chief Casey Snyder, left, stands with recently appointed Fire Chief Russell Knick. Knick will assume his new role May 6. (Special Photo)



A Gwinnett child watches as Eastside Medical Center's human-controlled robot picks up small rubber bands and places them onto squiggly pegs inside a covered tray. (Staff Photos: Isabel Hughes)

PEACHTREE CORNERS

Technology Parkway spot for self-driving shuttle testing

BY CURT YEOMANS
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By this time next year, Peachtree Corners residents will see a self-driving shuttle bus going up and down one of the city's streets, officials announced Wednesday.

Mayor Mike Mason was joined by representatives from the engineering consulting firm Atkins, Partnership Gwinnett and Prototype Prime as he announced plans to install a \$2 million programmed autonomous shuttle pilot program on Technology Parkway. The City Council approved the plans Tuesday night.

Officials are touting it as an economic development opportunity that could attract companies working with self-driving vehicle technology to

Peachtree Corners.

"The objective (of the test system) is not ridership, it's economic development," Mason said. "What we want to do is attract startups and existing businesses to come to Prototype Prime and help them test their technology on our test bed. Of course, the (return on investment) is we're trying to attract businesses here to be part of our community."

Peachtree Corners officials also said it is believed to be the first metro Atlanta city outside the perimeter to use the technology. For the foreseeable future, however, this will be a test run of the self-driving vehicle technology.

It will be limited to a 1.4-mile stretch of Technology Parkway between Spalding Drive, near Norcross High School, and Peachtree Parkway, where the Atlanta Marriott Peachtree Corners is located.

"When you look at the costs, there are a couple of different components," City Councilman Eric Christ said. "One is the shuttle itself — and we're still issuing (requests for proposals) and trying to determine what the perfect shuttle is ... If you set aside the shuttle costs, it's about \$1.4 million of infrastructure to build the track essentially on the road."

Sanjay Parekh, who is the executive director of the city's Prototype Prime

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Mechanical milestone

Eastside event celebrates 1,300 robot-aided surgeries

BY ISABEL HUGHES
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Pressing their small foreheads into the padded headrest of the Intuitive Surgical da Vinci Xi robot, children no older than five or six expertly navigated the machine using only their thumbs and middle fingers, which loosely fit into a pair of touch-activated rings that moved the machine's arms.

Though their feet couldn't even reach the floor, the children controlled the robot's four arms with ease, their eyes concentrated on the screen before them, each broad hand movement translating into a tiny movement by the robot's arms.

The scene, with the child-controlled robot picking up small rubber bands and placing them onto squiggly pegs that rested



Twelve students were honored for their entries into Eastside's "Name the Robot" art contest.

inside a covered tray, resembled that of a classroom, but instead of sitting in rows of desks at schools, the youngsters, along with parents and siblings, doctors, nurses and surgeons, took

over Eastside Medical Center's lobby to celebrate the hospital's robotic surgery milestone.

"There have been a lot of surgeries to get to this point and we're really excited for Eastside

MORE ONLINE

Visit gwinnettdaily.com for more photos of the open house.

(because) we've hit our mark of 1,300 surgeries on our robot," said Trent Lind, the hospital's CEO. "The ability to bring robotics into what we do here at Eastside doesn't make a surgeon better, but it definitely adds better tools for our surgeons to be more precise and have better visualizations within their practice."

On Wednesday, Eastside Medical Center opened its doors to the public for a robotic surgery open house, which also recognized a dozen Gwinnett County elementary school students who submitted entries to the hospital's "Name the Robot" art contest.

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Local pilot, entertainer killed in air show training crash in China

BY CURT YEOMANS
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Elgin Wells was known as high-flying aerobatic entertainer to some and a showman and teacher who could play more than a dozen instruments, but Eddie Owen knew him first and foremost as a friend.

Owen had known Wells, who lived in Peachtree Cor-

ners, since the mid-1970s when they met through a mutual friend. Over the years, Wells became a popular teacher at Eddie Owen Presents at the Red Clay Music Foundry, and he performed during Duluth Mayor Nancy Harris' last two State of the City addresses at the Foundry.

"He was just a top notch guy," Owen said. "They didn't come any better as a



teacher, an entertainer, a musician, a composer and as a friend. He was just top notch

Peachtree Corners resident Elgin Wells closes the canopy on his "Starjammer" plane prior to a flight in this 2015 file photo. Wells was reportedly killed in a plane crash in China while practicing for an air show. (File Photo)

in all of those areas."

The longtime friendship made the news that Wells

was killed in a plane crash in China while training for an upcoming air show extra hard for Owen to hear. Wells' wife Lisa called Owen and once they connected, she delivered the news.

XinhuaNet reported Wells' plane — "Starjammer" — crashed at Shangjie Airport in the city of Zhengzhou in central China on Wednesday. He had been

on a training flight for the Zhengzhou Air Show 2018, which is scheduled to open today, according to the news outlet.

Chinese officials are reportedly investigating the crash to determine what caused it.

"It was horrible to hear," Owen said. "I had the opportunity to speak to Lisa,

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