MEDIA RELEASE

OFFICE OF COUNTY MAYOR GLENN JACOBS

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Mayor Jacobs Highlights Historic and Ongoing Role of Knoxville Area Urban League

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.—Phyllis Nichols has served as CEO of the Knoxville Area Urban League (KAUL) since the turn of the century. In a recent interview with Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs, Nichols outlined the national organization's history and evolution since its establishment in 1909.

"The national organization was founded in New York City to help African Americans that were moving from the agrarian South to the industrial North for employment. The Urban League helped people find jobs and housing. We focus still on jobs and housing," said Nichols.

The Urban League established a chapter in Knoxville in 1968. Nichols said this was during a time when the organization shifted its focus to the South. That included Knoxville, despite a relatively small African American population.

"If you think in the context of The Civil Rights Act of 1964, it prohibited discrimination in employment if you received federal funding. You have to recall three big entities in this area: The University of Tennessee, TVA, and all things Oak Ridge. The Knoxville Area Urban League became the bridge for African Americans to seek employment in these areas," said Nichols.

Nichols said KAUL's mission to help people with housing, education, employment, and entrepreneurship has not changed. What has changed is who the group serves.

"In 1968, our clients were exclusively African Americans," said Nichols. "Today, we serve around 11,000 people per year and 66 percent are African Americans. It's not just focused on African Americans. It's for all who come to us for help."

KAUL offers computer labs, connectivity, training and coaching to help people searching for employment. It is also able to provide small business loans.

"The Urban League has capital to bring to this community," said Nichols.

You can watch the Knox Narratives with Nichols on YouTube and Facebook.

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