



# Pat Lorenzo Willis

*Class of 1966*

Business Leader / Community Advocate

Pat Lorenzo Willis came to Greenville High School via St. Michael's Elementary and Junior High. A 1966 graduate of GHS, she attended Marietta College in Marietta, Ohio, graduating in 1970 with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics. Post-graduation, she took graduate courses in Urban Studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia.

For almost fifty years, Pat's career spanned education and both corporate and non-profit sectors. Working for BellSouth Corporation, Pat was appointed the first Executive Director of the Bell-South Foundation. The focus of this organization was the improvement of public education in the southeast United States as well as Latin America where BellSouth was highly invested in telecommunication services.

From 1986-2002, Pat was the president of the Foundation and was part of a team that granted over fifty million dollars of funds over fourteen years. The Foundation partnered with Bell South to wire hundreds of schools for the internet and trained the schools' administrators to use the technology. Among the organizations where she devoted time and leadership were:

- The Citywide League of Neighborhoods where she led the effort to expand lending by banks and savings and loans for purchase and rehabilitation of homes in downtown neighborhoods in the City of Atlanta (1978-79)
- The Children's Museum of Atlanta where she chaired the board when they migrated from community-based programs to building a new physical facility in the early 2000s.
- The Atlanta Women's Foundation, Board Member
- The Council of Independent Colleges, Board Member
- The Foundation Center, Board Member (now called Candid since merging in 2019 with Guidestar)
- The Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform, Founding Board Member
- The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

Executive Director of Voices for Georgia's Children, she created "Georgia Pre-K Week" during which the Governor and other state executives and all 236 state legislators visited a state sponsored Pre-K program in their home districts and to read a story to children. The goal was to solidify political support for Georgia Pre-K and for all child care and education programs. Georgia Pre-K Week was launched each year with an event at the state capitol featuring a prominent children's book that was given to every Pre-K classroom and was read by the legislators during their visits. Georgia Pre-K Week continues annually as a partnership between Voices and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.

Pat has received numerous awards for her life's work: including a Distinguished Alumnus award in 2000 from her alma mater, Marietta College. Pat remains involved in many civic organizations in Georgia, one of which is volunteering with the Lynwood Park Foundation preserving the history of the first black neighborhood in DeKalb County, Georgia.

In answering a question about the impact the teachers in Greenville had on her life Pat stated, "I was grateful for the personal interest taken by Dean Crowther, our guidance counselor, in helping me look to the future, taking time to administer aptitude and interest tests and encouraging me (and my parents) to pursue college. I was appreciative but skeptical of Ted Marantis, our chemistry teacher, arranging for the home economics teacher to create a special home ec class for "academic girls" because we didn't know the chemical name for salt nor the impact of baking powder! Although we took the class because we felt compelled to, we did have a good time. I cherished the hours of personal conversation and bantering spent with librarian Bob Fagley and Coach McInturf in the library after school. We covered the gamut of topics - educational, extracurricular, and personal - and I always felt respected and valued for my thoughts. I loved Frank Stratiff's English class. For our final exam we had to analyze a poem, "Warning to Children" by Robert Graves. The poem reflects life and learning and building confidence and experience to keep moving forward. I posted that poem at my desk in every job I ever had and still keep an anthology of Graves' poems on my bookshelf today. It has served as encouragement that I am prepared to handle new opportunities and challenges. I've taken great pride in telling friends, through the years, that the best English teacher I ever had was a football coach!

Advice to her younger self:

"First: "Never close a door." A boss once told me that I don't get to open the door, I only get to walk through it. When that door opens, don't worry about whether the room will be familiar. Walk through with confidence and high expectations!

Second: "Don't be afraid to make mistakes." The worst you can do is to learn from a mistake and be prepared for the next time.

Third: "Make time to reflect." Having an experience, any experience, is valuable but purposefully thinking about what you did, why you did it, what you learned, and what you would do differently will expand your knowledge of yourself and prepare you for future opportunities. Do this regularly with yourself, with your subordinates, and with your colleagues. It's more than just evaluation and planning; it's opening your mind and heart to see what others see and to understand your potential.

Fourth: "Enjoy yourself!" You can't get back time. Balance your life among all the things that are important to you, and that will create the joy, the memories, and the relationships that will sustain you as you age."

Pat resides in Brookhaven, Georgia.