

Annual Conference Wrap-up

City of Danville
takes top honors



Inside:

Innovation Awards winners
Conference highlights
... and more!





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ABOUT THE COVER

The City of Danville took home the President's Award for Innovation in the Community Health category at this year's VML Annual Conference in Roanoke. Learn about all the category winners, check out some great pics from the conference, and get back in the Star City frame of mind one more time!

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2025 Innovation Awards Winners

*Roanoke is known for its one big star
But on the twelfth of October, from near and far
Came seven stars, to be feted and celebrated
In the city's historic hotel where all awaited
To learn which initiative of innovation
Would cause VML's president the most elation.*



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It's hard to stop taking pictures when there are many lovely people in one place! Good thing we don't have to buy film anymore or this photo spread would have cost a fortune. 26

VBCOA & MEPAV events

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Mike Still, reporter for the *Kingsport TimesNews*, shines a light on a group of volunteers (including Gate City Vice Mayor Kevin Barnett) doing good deeds with firewood. 37



Congratulations to the winners of awards and elections!

THANKS TO THE CITY OF ROANOKE for being such awesome hosts of the VML Conference! The weather was perfect, and the venues were awesome. I appreciate all our members attending and hope that you had an enjoyable and informative time. Our presenters were excellent and there were so many topics to choose from; thank you to them for being there as well. VML staff are excited to be back in Norfolk for next year's Annual Conference; as you recall we had to cancel our Norfolk trip during COVID so we're looping back to make up for the year we all had to spend not going anywhere! We are looking forward to making the most of everything the great City of Norfolk has to offer.

Congratulations to our Innovation Awards winners and special kudos to the City of Danville for taking home the top honor! I appreciate all the localities who submitted entries and VML looks forward to sharing those stories in the coming year so localities can "borrow" innovative ideas from each other.

Congratulations are also due to VML's new President Dwayne Tuggle, mayor of Amherst; we look forward to a great year. Look for his story (which is fascinating) in the next issue of the magazine.

And finally, the election is over...which means that the election ads are finished! No matter who you voted for or wanted to win – thank you for exercising your right to vote. As you know, elections bring out very strong feelings; but hopefully we will give grace to all. Congratulations to all the re-elected and

newly elected officials; we hope that you will attend the VML Elected Officials Conference which will be held on January 7-8 here in Richmond. It will include the mandated Freedom of Information Act and Conflict of Interest Act training that is required within six months of being elected and every two years.

Next up: preparing for the 2026 General Assembly Session and welcoming all the new members. There are many! If you meet them, please share the VML legislative package with them along with your localities' legislative priorities. Ours can be found at www.vml.org/Advocacy/Legislative-Program.

For 2025, VML's priorities include maintaining local land use authority, supporting public education, the 1% local option sales tax for school construction, and making sure that any locally mandated tax relief is backfilled by the state. Thanks to all who attended the Annual Business Meeting during the conference in Roanoke and especially thanks to those who provided comments.

In closing, I would be remiss if I didn't thank Town of Ashland Mayor Steve Trivett for his service as president of VML during the past year. Mayor Trivett worked very hard for VML during his tenure. Thank you, Steve!



Learn more about these events and additional opportunities at www.vml.org

CALENDAR

Jan. 7-8

2026 Virginia Local Elected Officials Conference - The Place at Innsbrook, Richmond, VA. Registration and information at www.vml.org.

Feb. 5

2026 Local Government Day - Richmond Downtown Hilton, Richmond, VA. Registration and information at www.vml.org.

May 14-15

2026 Small Towns Conference - The Chincoteague Center, Chincoteague, VA



In Memoriam:

Former Chesapeake Vice Mayor John Michel de Triquet



- de Triquet -

Dr. John Michel de Triquet, beloved husband, father, servant leader, pediatric physician, and former vice mayor of the City of Chesapeake, passed away August 22.

Dr. de Triquet devoted many years to the advocacy and care of abused children and was the first medical director of the Child Advocacy Center of Hampton Roads. As a forensic pediatrician, he testified in court in many child abuse cases, not only in Hampton Roads, but across the nation. An accomplished pianist, artist, and student of history, he loved quiet time at his piano, listening to classical music, or reading. His art ranged from painting intricate miniature models to impressionistic pictures. He was a true Renaissance man.

Chesapeake Mayor Rick West shared the following statement: “The City of Chesapeake has lost a true public servant, in every sense of the term. Dr. John de Triquet served more than 30 years as a member of the Chesapeake City Council, holding the position of vice mayor many times throughout his tenure. His wisdom, thoughtful demeanor, and desire to hear from and see all sides of an issue helped shape Chesapeake into the thriving city it is today. I am saddened by the loss our community is feeling, and even more saddened at the loss of a gentleman I was proud to call a friend.

Dr. de Triquet’s dedication to improving the lives of Chesapeake’s residents, his leadership, and his unwavering belief in the mission of the ‘City That Cares’ has left a lasting legacy on our community. We extend our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and all who had the privilege of working alongside him. His service and dedication will not be forgotten.”

Memorial contributions may be made to Children’s Hospital of The Kings Daughters in honor of Dr. John Michel de Triquet. Condolences may be expressed to the family at www.omanfh.com.

Former Amherst Town Councilmember Richard “Dickie” Wydner Jr.



- Wydner -

The Amherst County community mourns the loss of **Richard “Dickie” Wydner Jr.**, 88, a former Amherst Town Councilmember who passed away September 21.

Wydner was born in Smyth County on July 21, 1937. After he graduated from Amherst High School and Phillips Business College, Wydner began his 42-year career with Lynchburg Foundry, retiring as manager

of iron melting. While working at the foundry, he served as advisor for the Junior Achievement program.

Community service was also of special interest to Wydner. He served on the Amherst Town Council, stepping down in 2014 after more than a decade of service. He also served on the town’s Industrial Development Authority Board and volunteered for the Amherst Town Fire Department. He was a member of the Virginia Baptist Disaster Relief Team traveling to New York City after the September 11 terrorist attacks and to Louisiana and Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina.

Richmond hires Morrison as director of Intergovernmental Affairs



- Morrison -

On September 29 **Ruth Morrison** began as the City of Richmond’s new director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. The office advances city priorities and policies in relationship with

local, state, and federal policymakers, regional counterparts, and other governmental stakeholders.

In her 12+ years of experience, Morrison has worked at the federal, state, and local levels, most recently as the policy director of the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts. Her career has spanned various roles and institutions, including work in nonprofit innovation, electoral and advocacy training, and national environmental organizing.

“Richmond City Council is excited to work with Ms. Morrison in this new role,” said Richmond City Council President Cynthia Newbille. “After working together to establish Richmond’s Health Equity Fund, I know that she is committed to innovative, evidence-based projects and brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the work of bringing cross-sector partners together.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Morrison organized initial containment operations to provide resources for some of the most at-risk populations in Central Virginia. During that period of intensifying health disparities, Morrison worked with Richmond City Council to establish the Health Equity Fund, investing a combination of federal, philanthropic, corporate, and local dollars in community-rooted services for Richmond residents.

Alongside partners in state government, Morrison has helped champion the critical role that doulas, community health workers, and grassroots community service providers all play in improving health outcomes for priority communities. She has been a long-time member of both the Richmond and Henrico Opioid Abatement Task Forces, maximizing the use of federal settlement dollars through the Opioid Abatement Authority on harm reduction, treatment, prevention, and recovery services. Serving on Mayor Danny Avula’s Transition Executive Team, she supported the outlining of new administration priorities and plan recommendations with dozens of community experts in healthcare access, climate and environment, transportation, and behavioral health.

Morrison holds a Bachelor's in Environmental Science and Latin American History from Bowdoin College. Locally, Morrison has served on several boards and committees and led cross-sector collaboratives and coalitions.

County of Arlington selects Hartell as chief information officer, Parrish as public health director



The County of Arlington has announced two recent hirings: **Holly Hartell** as the new chief information officer and director of the Department of Technology Services (DTS), and Dr.

- Hartell - Deidra D. Parrish as public health director in the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Holly Hartell began the permanent role on August 11 after being appointed as acting director of DTS in January 2025.

"In nearly two decades of service to Arlington County, Holly has consistently driven innovation and alignment across initiatives, ensuring departments have the technology

support and strategic guidance they need," County Manager Mark Schwartz said in a press release. "Her extensive experience and understanding of our organization make her the ideal person to lead us forward in the expanding and evolving area of technology."

In this leadership role, Hartell oversees the county's information technology (IT) services and IT operations teams to ensure a safe and secure online environment. Her portfolio includes overseeing the county's telecommunications, infrastructure, data privacy, cybersecurity, enterprise applications, customer experience, digital services, web services, and emerging technologies.

Hartell joined Arlington County Government in 2006 as a technology consultant, where she led the successful financial implementation of PRISM, the county's integrated financial and human resources platform. She managed PRISM operations for six years, ensuring its stability and effectiveness, before transitioning to broader technology roles.

Most recently, she served as the assistant chief information officer for Strategic Initiatives in DTS. In that role, she was responsible for aligning technology investments with the strategic direction of the county and for ex-

panding and improving government services for the public. During her time with Arlington, her work has been pivotal in advancing digital equity and exploring Smart City and Smart Community opportunities.

Prior to joining the county, Hartell was a consultant for BearingPoint, a management and technology consulting firm, where she supported higher education and local government clients with Oracle Financial systems and business process improvements. Hartell holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business.

Dr. Deidra D. Parrish will provide overall leadership and direction for public



- Parrish - health programs and serve as the official health advisor for Arlington County. The public health director serves as the local lead of the Arlington Health District for the Virginia Department of Health and is responsible for developing, implementing, and managing the county's public health policy and emergency preparedness and response efforts.



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Parrish is a board-certified infectious diseases and preventive medicine physician with over two decades of public health experience at the local, state, national, and international levels. She most recently served in the U.S. Agency for International Development as a senior advisor in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for HIV testing and treatment and co-led the interagency Global-Domestic HIV Bidirectional Learning Forum.

Previously, Parrish worked at the Tennessee Department of Health where she was the regional medical director for the largest public health jurisdiction in the state and served as chief medical officer for a rural Federally Qualified Health Center. Prior roles include communicable disease physician for Metro Nashville Public Health, sexually transmitted diseases fellow at CDC, and various academic appointments.

Parrish is an alumna of Howard University (BS), University of Alabama School of Medicine (MD), and Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

Roanoke County announces retirement of Deputy County Administrator Owens, appointment of Blount



- Owens -

Roanoke County Deputy County Administrator **Rebecca E. Owens** will retire December 1 after more than 33 years of public service. Doug Blount has been appointed to fill the vacancy created by Owens' retirement, also effective December 1.

Owens joined Roanoke County in 2000 as a finance manager, was later promoted to director of finance, was appointed assistant county administrator in 2019, and became deputy county administrator in 2022. Prior to joining the county, she worked for the City of Salem.

"Rebecca is widely recognized as a strong leader, especially in local government finance," said Roanoke County Administrator Richard L. Caywood, P.E. "She has represented Roanoke County and the wider region through many committees, boards, and initiatives that have helped shape our community. Her dedication, expertise, and thoughtful leadership have had a lasting impact on our organization. All of us at Roanoke County are grateful for her more than 25 years of service and wish her the very best in a well-deserved retirement."



- Blount -

"Doug brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to our community," said Caywood. "His leadership, expertise, and vision will play a key role in shaping the future of our organization, and I'm excited to see the impact he will continue to make. Doug's leadership has been instrumental in many of our recent economic development successes, including Wells Fargo, Mack Trucks, Publix, and many other important projects."

Blount, a Roanoke County native, has nearly 30 years of local government experience, including 15 years with the Prince William County Park Authority in various leadership roles. In his time with Roanoke County, he has overseen the county's capital program delivery and departments including Economic Development, Parks, Recreation & Tourism, General Services, Development Services, Libraries, and Planning.

Blount holds a Bachelor's in Business Administration from East Tennessee State University.

Moore is Loudoun County's new director of Human Resources



- Moore -

recruitment search.

Moore brings more than two decades of leadership experience in human resources management across large federal organizations. Most recently, she served as the chief human capital officer with the U.S. Department of Energy, where she led HR strategy and operations for a workforce of 16,000 federal employees. Prior to joining the Department of Energy in 2014, Moore held several HR leadership positions throughout the Department of Defense, including the Department of the Air Force, the Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service, and the Department of the Navy.

"Ms. Moore demonstrated outstanding knowledge and experience among a com-

Doug Blount has served Roanoke County since 2011, initially as director of Parks, Recreation & Tourism, and as assistant county administrator since 2022.

"Doug brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to our community," said Caywood. "His leadership, expertise, and vision will play a key role in shaping the future of our organization, and I'm excited to see the impact he will continue to make. Doug's leadership has been instrumental in many of our recent economic development successes, including Wells Fargo, Mack Trucks, Publix, and many other important projects."

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Blount holds a Bachelor's in Business Administration from East Tennessee State University.

petitive pool of applicants for this important position," said County Administrator Tim Hemstreet in a statement. "She is an innovative and proven leader who will play a key role in upholding Loudoun's commitment to attracting, developing, and retaining exceptional talent."

Moore holds a Bachelor's in Industrial Engineering from Penn State University and a Master's in Engineering Administration from Virginia Tech.

City of Fredericksburg: Chief of Police Layton announces retirement, Flippen named assistant city manager for Utilities and Capital Projects, Casarotti appointed director of Parks, Recreation and Events



- Layton -

After three decades of dedicated service to the Fredericksburg community, Chief of Police **Brian Layton** has announced his retirement, effective January 1. Layton, who has served the city since 1994 and as police chief since January 2020, leaves behind a legacy of leadership, modernization, and community-focused policing.

During his tenure as chief, the Fredericksburg Police Department experienced significant organizational growth and success. Layton also played a vital role in regional public safety, serving as co-chairman of both the Rappahannock Regional Criminal Justice Academy Executive Board and the Rappahannock Regional Jail Authority Board.

City Manager Timothy Baroody praised Layton's contributions, stating, "Chief Layton has served this community with integrity, dedication, and unwavering commitment to public safety. His leadership has left a lasting impact on the police department and the city as a whole. We thank him for his years of service and wish him the very best in his well-earned retirement."

Baroody has appointed Deputy Chief Betsy Mason as interim police chief, effective January 1. A permanent police chief announcement is expected in 2026.

The City of Fredericksburg has hired **Todd Flippen** in the new position of assistant city manager for Utilities and Capital Projects. Flippen brings more than two de-



- Flippen -

acades of experience in local government and public infrastructure management within the Commonwealth of Virginia, most recently serving as director of Public Works and city engineer for the City of Colonial Heights.

"In his new role, Todd will lead and support strategic initiatives related to water, wastewater, and stormwater, along with oversight of the city's Utilities division, which is being separated from the Department of Public Works," Baroody said in a statement. "His technical background, combined with executive-level leadership experience, will play a critical role in advancing Fredericksburg's priorities for infrastructure resilience, service delivery, and sustainable growth. Todd will be very involved in advancing Fire Station #3, the Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade and expansion, and many smaller water, wastewater and stormwater projects already approved or planned in the adopted Capital Improvement Plan."

While in Colonial Heights, Flippen managed multimillion-dollar capital projects and worked closely with regional and state partners. He is a licensed Professional Engineer in the Commonwealth of Virginia and holds multiple certifications from the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Department of Environmental Quality. He is also a graduate of the University of Virginia's Senior Executive Institute, a program focused on leadership excellence in public service. Flippen earned his Bachelor's in Biological Engineering from North Carolina State University and a Master's in Public Administration from James Madison University.



- Casarotti -

The city also recently appointed **Jennifer Casarotti** as the new director of Parks, Recreation and Events (FPRE). Casarotti brings more than 20 years of diverse experience in parks and recreation leadership at the local and federal levels. In her new role, Casarotti oversees the city's parks, facilities, programs, and community events. She leads strategic planning, budgeting, and capital projects while guiding staff to provide high-quality, inclusive recreational services that enrich community life in Fredericksburg.

Casarotti began her career with Spotsylvania Parks and Recreation before joining the United States Marine Corps as part of Headquarters Marine Corps, where she oversaw commercial recreation programs at installations worldwide. Casarotti also represented the Marine Corps at the Department of Defense level, advocating for the needs of

installations across the globe.

She returned to Fredericksburg to serve as superintendent of Leisure Services, where she focused on strengthening programs, building partnerships, and enhancing services for city residents. She later advanced to the role of assistant director before being named director.

In making this appointment, Baroody stated, "City council has supported boosting Parks funding by over 50% since 2019, knowing the important role our parks system plays in community health and wellbeing. In endorsing the Parks Master Plan in 2021, council has asked staff to lean forward in enhanced programming, tackling deferred maintenance, and striving to best practices in park operations. I am very confident that Jenny can continue the city's momentum on all fronts."

Casarotti holds a Bachelor's in Sports Management with minors in Business and Law from Methodist University, and a Master's in Business Administration from Grantham University. She has also completed the Strategic Business Leadership Program at the UNC School of Business. She is a Certified Parks and Recreation Executive, a Certified Program Planner, and an Aquatic Facility Operator.

Lexington appoints Panebianco as interim chief of police

Anthony "AJ" Panebianco began serving as interim chief of police for the City of



- Panebianco -

Lexington on August 11 and will act in this capacity until a full-time chief is hired. Panebianco is stepping in to assist the Lexington Police Department following the retirement of Police Chief Angela Greene. Greene has taken a new role serving the entire Commonwealth of Virginia as the attorney general's senior director of programs and outreach after capably serving Lexington for the last four years.

Chief Panebianco brings more than 35 years of police experience to Lexington and previously served as chief of police in Buena Vista and Middleburg. Panebianco retired from Middleburg in 2023, is the author of three books, and is a past president of the Virginia Chiefs of Police Association.

In a press release, City Manager Tom Carroll said, "Chief Panebianco's charge is to provide stability, leadership, and professional development for the LPD. We could

not find a more capable law enforcement professional to help us over the next few months."

Since retiring two years ago, Panebianco has provided law enforcement consulting services to police departments including staffing studies, organizational assessments, and leadership development. He has also served as interim chief of police in several locations throughout Virginia.

Blacksburg Police Chief Clair selected as 100th president of Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police



- Clair -

Town of Blacksburg Chief of Police **John Clair** has been selected as the 2025-2026 president of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police (VACP). Formed in 1926, the VACP promotes professional development for Virginia law enforcement leaders, fosters cooperation among agencies, advances officer training and standards, and upholds respect for law and order statewide.

Clair was appointed Blacksburg's chief of police in May 2025 and currently leads the town's nationally accredited department of 70 sworn officers and 12 civilian staff dedicated to safeguarding and serving the community's more than 44,000 residents. Prior to his tenure in Blacksburg, Clair served as chief of police in Marion and Quantico. Clair also previously worked as an officer with the Prince William County and Dumfries Police Departments and held protective service roles with the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of State. A veteran of the U.S. Army, Clair served as a Military Police sergeant in the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard).

"Chief Clair's appointment as president of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police reflects his dedication to professional excellence, community engagement, and innovative policing strategies," said Town Manager Marc Verniel in a press release. "The Town of Blacksburg is proud to support his service in this statewide leadership role and to see his expertise and leadership recognized by his peers throughout Virginia law enforcement."

Clair is a certified Law Enforcement Chief Executive Officer through the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police and served most recently as the organization's first vice president. He has authored numerous articles on community policing, is

an expert advisor for various professional organizations, and recently served as a guest instructor at the Appalachian School of Law, where he lectured on crisis communications and negotiations.

Ashland welcomes Thomas as economic development coordinator, promotes Franke to marketing & events coordinator



- Thomas -

The Town of Ashland has hired **Daniel Thomas** as its new economic development coordinator and promoted Kelly Franke to marketing & events coordinator.

A Richmond native and proud graduate of Benedictine High School, Thomas brings a passion for participatory government, business strategy, and all things real estate. With a background in commercial real estate analysis and investment, he understands the challenges and opportunities faced by Main Street businesses.

Thomas recently completed his MBA at Longwood University and is already diving in to support Ashland's business community with fresh energy and insight.



- Franke -

After two years supporting local businesses in Economic Development, **Kelly Franke** has been promoted to the role of marketing & events coordinator. This dedicated position will allow the town to focus

more intentionally on tourism, events, and telling Ashland's story — boosting visibility for local businesses and strengthening its identity as the "Center of the Universe."

Franke earned her BSBA in Marketing from Old Dominion University and is a member of several local and national organizations that support small businesses and economic development.

Oprandy joins Charlottesville as Emergency Management coordinator

John Oprandy joined the City of Charlottesville on September 2 as Emergency Management coordinator after more than 25 years of experience with Albemarle County Fire Rescue, where he most recently served as deputy chief of Emergency Management. In that role, he established the county's Office of Emergency Management in 2019, built



- Oprandy -

Prior to his tenure with Albemarle County, Oprandy served with the Charlottesville Fire Department from 1992 to 1999.

"John returns to the city with deep experience in Emergency Management," said City Manager Sam Sanders. "We look forward to him building out a reliable framework to help ensure this community is safe and ready to respond to any emergency we may face."

Throughout his career, Oprandy has advanced operational leadership, continuity planning, capital project management, and regional collaboration across public safety agencies. His efforts have shaped policy, enhanced emergency response capabilities, and secured critical grants and capital investments for infrastructure, equipment, and training.

As a skilled facilitator and instructor, Oprandy has led national fire service leadership workshops and championed efforts to build a more inclusive and diverse fire rescue workforce. He holds a Bachelor's in Emergency Service Management and Computer Information Systems from James Madison University and remains active in the community through nonprofit leadership and volunteer service.

Herndon appoints Hoffman as town manager



- Hoffman -

The Herndon Town Council has named **Dan Hoffman** the new town manager; the appointment was effective November 10. "By selecting Dan Hoffman as Herndon's next town manager, we're welcoming a leader with a proven track record of strengthening organizations, fostering collaboration, and driving innovation," said Herndon Mayor Keven LeBlanc. "His deep experience in local government and ability to turn vision into action will help Herndon thrive as a community where residents, businesses, and visitors feel supported and engaged."

Hoffman brings over 25 years of leadership and public service experience. His ca-

a countywide Incident Management Team, and launched the Emergency Operations Center. He also led strategic initiatives to strengthen community preparedness and resilience.

reer includes modernizing municipal operations, guiding strategic initiatives, advancing economic development, and building collaborative, high-performing teams.

Hoffman joins Herndon from the City of Winchester, where he served as city manager for the past five years. During his tenure, he digitized key services, strengthened financial management, modernized community engagement, and led major economic development projects.

Prior to his role in Winchester, Hoffman served as assistant city manager for Gainesville, FL, where he oversaw multiple departments and led initiatives that improved internal operations and enhanced community services. He also held leadership roles with Montgomery County, MD, the District of Columbia, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Hoffman serves on the board of Virginia First Cities and is a member of both the International City/County Management Association and the Virginia Local Government Management Association. He holds a Bachelor's from The George Washington University and a Master's from Johns Hopkins University.

Louisa welcomes Turille as new town manager



- Turille -

At its September 16 meeting, the Louisa Town Council voted to hire **Stuart Turille** as the new town manager. Turille started his duties on October 1.

Interim Town Manager Craig Buckley served in the position for roughly eight months after the resignation of former Town Manager Liz Nelson in December 2024. At recent council meetings, Buckley made the council aware of his plans to retire by the end of August.

Turille's previous experience includes stints as city manager for the City of Southport, NC (July 2024-February 2025), county administrator for Pittsylvania County (February 2023-February 2024), city manager for the City of Petersburg (July 2021-March 2022), and deputy county administrator for the County of Essex (October 2018-June 2021).

Turille, a Lynchburg native, received his Bachelor's in English from the University of Virginia in 1983 and graduated from the University of Richmond School of Law in 1986.

Saunders introduced as Franklin interim city manager



- Saunders -

recently resigned.

Saunders currently serves as senior director of local public affairs with Capital Results, a public affairs and business consulting firm. Prior to taking the role in Franklin, Saunders spent over eight years working with the City of Richmond, including stints as chief administrative officer, acting chief administrative officer, and chief of staff for the Office of the Mayor.

In the city council meeting, Saunders noted that his initial points of focus would include Franklin's annual audits, capital projects, and starting a master planning process.

Saunders holds a Bachelor's in Political Science and Government from the College of William & Mary and a Master's in Public Affairs from Indiana University.

Newport News names Alexander new director of Human Resources

The City of Newport News has appointed **Tyrome "Ty" D. Alexander**, MBA, PHR, PSHRA-SCP, SHRM-SCP as its new director of Human Resources. He assumed the role on October 20.



- Alexander -

A high-impact leader with more than 20 years of experience in human resources management, employee and labor relations, conflict resolution, and organizational strategy, Alexander will oversee all HR operations for the city's workforce and lead initiatives to enhance employee engagement, streamline processes, and advance Newport News as an employer of choice.

Alexander most recently served as the director of Human Resources for the City of Richmond, where he successfully revamped the Human Resources Department, launched new learning and development programs, and implemented compensation and benefits enhancements, including employer-sponsored health clinics. Prior to that, he served as director of Human Re-

sources for the City of Toledo, OH, where he developed a three-year HR strategic plan, strengthened employee engagement, and guided the city through its COVID-19 response strategy.

With additional leadership roles at Impact Community Action, Columbus Metropolitan Library, and The Ohio State University, Alexander brings a proven track record of driving strategic initiatives, fostering inclusive workplaces, and balancing organizational goals with the needs of employees.

City Manager Alan K. Archer expressed confidence in the appointment, stating, "We are thrilled to welcome Tyrome to Newport News. With extensive experience leading human resources in both municipal government and nonprofit organizations, he brings the vision, expertise, and passion needed to strengthen our workforce and support the city's mission of service. I look forward to partnering with Tyrome as we continue building a culture where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed."

Alexander holds a Master's in Business Administration from Ohio Dominican University and a Bachelor's in Political Science from The Ohio State University. He also holds multiple professional certifications, including the Professional in Human Resources (PHR), the Public Sector Human Resources Association Senior Certified Professional (PSHRA-SCP), and the Society for Human Resource Management Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP).

Christenson appointed as new Alexandria deputy city manager

Alexandria City Manager James Parajon has announced the appointment of **Jane Christenson** as deputy



- Christenson -

city manager, following a national search involving over 200 candidates from across the country. A native of the D.C. metropolitan area and a longtime public servant, Christenson brings more than two decades of executive leadership in local government. Her career has focused on managing complex municipal operations across urban and suburban communities, with a strong emphasis on neighborhood public safety, responsible economic growth, and delivering high-quality services that enhance community well-being.

"Jane brings an exceptional combination of strategic insight, operational expertise,

and executive leadership," said Parajon in a statement. "She has successfully led large, complex organizations through growth and change, while delivering results across diverse policy areas. Her experience will be instrumental as we continue to advance Alexandria's strategic goals and serve the community with excellence."

Most recently, Christenson served as the chief executive officer for Placer County, CA, serving a population of more than 400,000 residents. In this capacity, she provided executive oversight for a 3,000-employee organization, administering multidisciplinary services while advancing strategic initiatives. Her portfolio included daily operations, regional infrastructure partnerships, legislative affairs, and initiatives focused on balancing responsible development with community conservation and open space priorities.

Previously, Christenson led the strategic direction and daily operations for the City of Redmond, WA. Her work there emphasized innovation, cross-sector collaboration, and regional planning to support sustainable, community-centered development. She is also known for her efforts to grow local innovation economies as a means of improving quality of life for both residents and businesses.

Christenson holds a Bachelor of Science from Cornell University and a Master of Arts from the UCLA Luskin School of Public Policy. She officially joined the city on October 14.

James City County Police Chaplain Garner retires

Reverend **Randy Garner** signed up for the James City County Police Department's



- Garner -

Citizens Police Academy on a whim 25 years ago and knew immediately how he could serve. He retired in September as the department's first volunteer chaplain. Garner began serving in the spring of 2000, going on to demonstrate unwavering dedication to the community across the tenures of six successive police chiefs. A man of proven character and a trusted confidant, his steady presence, compassion, and integrity have been a source of strength through the department's most difficult and defining moments.

A member of the early crisis negotiations team, Garner supported critical incident debriefings for first responders. During his tenure he never turned down an opportu-

nity to serve, including as star pitcher for the department's softball team, where he earned the nickname "Chappy." He was recently honored with the James City County Police Department's Distinguished Service Medal for his years of faithful commitment to the emotional and spiritual well-being of the officers, staff, and community members.

Petersburg welcomes Lester as city arborist



- Lester -

The City of Petersburg has appointed **Janine Lester** as city arborist, a position funded by a grant from the Virginia Department of Forestry through September 30, 2026. Lester brings deep expertise as a Board Certified Master Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and Qualified Tree Risk Assessor, and is notably the only female Master Arborist in Virginia. Already, Lester has taken on two major initiatives that will benefit the community: the finalization of Petersburg's tree ordinance and the rollout of a street-by-street public tree inventory, with field crews actively mapping the urban canopy.

Bowling Green's Adams-Jacobs receives ICMA Credentialed Manager designation



India Adams-Jacobs, Bowling Green town manager, recently received the Credentialed Manager designation from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Adams-Jacobs, MPA, is one of just 1,300 local government management professionals currently credentialed through the ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program.

ICMA's mission is to advance professional local government through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics, and to increase the proficiency of appointed chief administrative officers, assistant administrators, and other employees who serve local governments and regional entities around the world.

To receive the prestigious ICMA credential, a member must have significant experience as a senior management executive in local government; have earned a degree, preferably in public administration or a re-

lated field; and demonstrate a commitment to high standards of integrity and to lifelong learning and professional development.

Bowling Green Vice Mayor Valarie Coyle said, "Credentials and education are incredibly important for local government managers, and I'm incredibly happy for Ms. Adams-Jacobs, who is a consummate professional, for obtaining this credential."

Adams-Jacobs has seven years of professional local government executive experience and over a decade of local government experience, serving in counties, cities, and towns. Before she was appointed town manager of Bowling Green in January 2024, she served as town manager of Colonial Beach and assistant to the city manager with the City of Petersburg.

Highlights of Adams-Jacobs' ICMA membership include: ICMA Fellowship Advisory Board, ICMA Conference Education Committee, ICMA Local Government Management Fellow 2014-2016, completion of a two-year professional development program in the ICMA Emerging Leaders program in 2019, and the Virginia Institute of Government Senior Executive in 2022. She has served in various leadership capacities as part of the Virginia Local Government Management Association Executive Board, the state affiliate of ICMA, where she was most recently appointed as president-elect.

Breedlove retires after 42 years with Town of Kenbridge



- Breedlove -

The Town of Kenbridge has announced the retirement of **Charles Breedlove** from the Maintenance Department. Breedlove was a Kenbridge employee for more than 42 years, starting on the back of a trash truck and working his way to the top as maintenance supervisor.

In a statement, the town thanked Breedlove for his dedication and service: "We will miss his leadership and especially his knowledge of the infrastructure of piping and information on town utilities. He has given us many late hours, weekends, and personal help, and helped all of our businesses from one time to the next. Please join us in wishing Charles all the best in the future and if you see him around in the next few weeks, please let him know how much we have appreciated his efforts to keep Kenbridge growing and operating."

Town of Strasburg announces retirement of Town Manager Coggsdale; to be succeeded by Assistant Town Manager Shipe



- Coggsdale -

Strasburg Town Manager **Waverly Coggsdale** has shared his plans to retire on December 31, concluding a long career in local government. Mayor Brandy Hawkins Boies expressed appreciation for his years of public service and his contributions to Strasburg.

"Waverly has served the Town of Strasburg with dedication and professionalism for the past four years," said Mayor Boies. "We appreciate his steady service and his efforts to guide the town through a period of growth and change."



- Shipe -

Mayor Boies added, "We are proud to say that we have built a very strong succession plan with **Mellanie Shipe**, assistant town manager, as she will begin to take on day-to-day responsibilities of the town manager. Her leadership, experience, and deep knowledge of town operations will ensure a smooth and successful transition. Mellanie's commitment to the town and her strong organizational and communication skills position her well to lead Strasburg into its next chapter."

Movers and shakers

Do you know someone who's on the move? Send your announcements about new hires in local government, promotions, retirements, awards and honors to vtc@vml.org.

Alexandria initiative uses video to educate residents about the root causes of homelessness

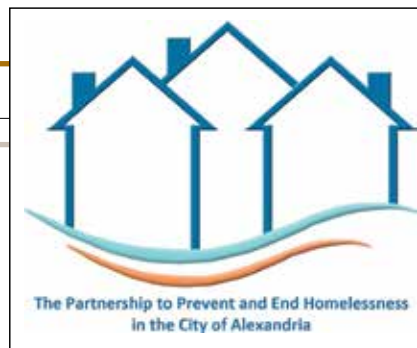
THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA'S Partnership to Prevent and End Homelessness recently created a video to counter negative stereotypes of homelessness. One of the most common reasons for homelessness is family changes or relationship dissolution, which accounts for approximately 26% of cases. The emotional and financial strain that comes from these personal upheavals can be overwhelming, making it difficult for individuals to maintain stable housing, especially when resources are limited.

Another significant factor contributing to homelessness is the burden of housing costs. Nearly one-third of households facing homelessness report that excessive housing costs and a lack of affordable housing are key contributors to their situation. Rising rent prices, stagnant wages, and a shortage of affordable housing

options leave many individuals and families struggling to keep a roof over their heads. This economic pressure often forces them into unstable living situations, eventually leading to homelessness when they are unable to cover their basic needs.

While criminal activity is often linked to stereotypes about homelessness, only 1% of households experiencing homelessness cite it as the primary cause. One quarter of people report becoming homeless due to an eviction. This highlights that the overwhelming majority of people who become homeless do so due to economic hardship or personal circumstances.

Use the QR code to watch the video.



Hampton opens Shoreline Operations Station at Buckroe Beach

HAMPTON CITY OFFICIALS cut the ribbon in September to celebrate the permanent structure for the Shoreline Operations Station (SOS) at Buckroe Beach. The satellite station opened for the 2025 beach season as a pilot program by the Hampton Police Division in coordination with the Hopeful Hampton collaborative.

The SOS, developed to ensure a safe and enjoyable beach experience for all residents and guests, has been operational since Memorial Day. Assistant Police Chief Jason Price noted that between Memorial Day and Labor Day, the station interacted with more than 2,000 beachgoers, offering safety guidance and other information, providing first aid and helping several lost children reunite with their parents.

The post provides a clear, consistent location for beachgoers to interact with officers, seek minor first aid or hydration, and re-

port any issues or concerns. Price said that many guests stopped to inquire about career opportunities with the Hampton Police Division. The SOS also serves as a deterrent to anyone who may wish to disrupt public safety.

Mayor Jimmy Gray praised everyone who played a role in the successful launch of the SOS. He said the city has begun surveying teens about what they want to see in the public space at Buckroe and said the survey would expand into high schools this year.



Staunton completes Peyton Stream restoration

THE CITY OF STAUNTON recently celebrated the completion of its stream restoration project in Gypsy Hill Park. This major environmental initiative restores about 1,500 linear feet of stream, reduces erosion, improves water quality, and enhances habitat and aesthetics in one of the city's most beloved community spaces.

Years of stormwater runoff from surrounding neighborhoods had caused sections of Peyton Creek to erode, carrying sediment into the waterway and degrading the conditions for aquatic life. The Gypsy Hill Park Stream Restoration Project has repaired the damaged channel, stabilized streambanks, and created new ecological features, while preserving the park's historic trees.

Additionally, the project will help Staunton meet state and federal stormwater pollution reduction requirements under the Chesapeake Bay Act. At this stage, the restoration removes 33

pounds of phosphorus, 88.7 pounds of nitrogen, and 103,200 pounds of sediment annually, helping the city to reach its total nutrient reduction obligations by 2028.

"This project is about more than just meeting environmental mandates. It's about uplifting a special part of our community," said Environmental Programs Administrator Willow Hughes. "By daylighting the stream, creating new habitat, and protecting trees, we're improving the health of Peyton Creek and making Gypsy Hill Park even more enjoyable for residents and visitors."



Falls Church City Council unveils portraits honoring local trailblazers

THE FALLS CHURCH CITY COUNCIL celebrated the city's 75th anniversary in September, unveiling commissioned portraits of two trailblazing local figures whose service helped shape Falls Church.

Carol DeLong and Frederick Foote Jr. were honored at the September 8 city council meeting. DeLong (1930-2023) served on the city council from 1974-1990, including terms as vice mayor

and mayor. She advocated for the Falls Church Housing Corporation's purchase of 81 Winter Hill apartments to preserve low-income housing for elderly and disabled residents. DeLong also championed the establishment of Aurora House, a residential counseling center for adolescent girls, and oversaw key infrastructure projects including the City Hall East Wing addition, Madison Park, and the West Broad Street streetscape between West Street and Haycock Road

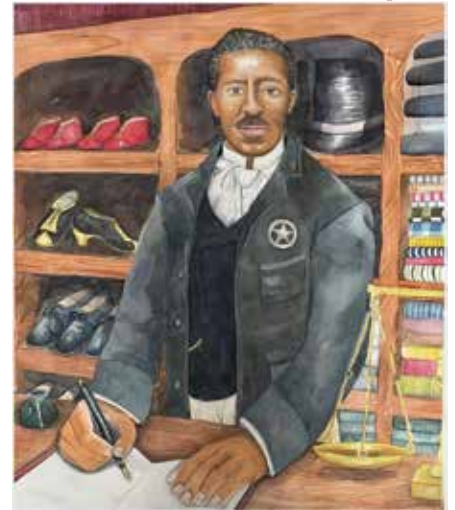
in accordance with her family's wishes, I would depict City Hall in the background, clearly identifiable but faintly rendered so that it does not compete with her face. Carol was very proud that Falls Church qualified as a Tree City; to honor that designation, I have included a dogwood branch."

Foote (1846-1899) was a cobbler and businessman who owned a general store in the heart of the community, serving both Black and white customers. He was elected town constable in 1875, the year Falls Church became an incorporated town, and was the first Black person to serve on the town council, holding office for four terms from 1880 to 1889.

Foote's portrait was painted by Asia Anderson, who stated, "In the portrait, I wanted to emphasize Foote as a man of the community – a beacon and a source of pride for Falls Church. He is depicted as a merchant and the store's owner, to reflect his role and accomplishments. He stands confidently behind the counter, holding a fountain pen, ready to write in his ledger. His posture and direct gaze convey strength, pride, and determination, symbolizing the history he made and the legacy he left behind."



DeLong's portrait was painted by Deborah Conn, whose vision was "to recognize Carol as the city's first woman mayor, and



Winchester's Neighborhood Design Districts: A blueprint for tomorrow

THE CITY OF WINCHESTER is transforming through Neighborhood Design Districts (NDD), a community-driven revitalization strategy.

The NDD blueprint calls for the city to work with residents to proactively plan and revitalize targeted areas of the community. Through resident-led committees, focus groups, open houses, and surveys, locals weigh in on what kind of neighborhoods they would like to see in the coming years. This might include new housing options (both rentable and for purchase), shopping and

businesses, parks, more walkable and bikeable lanes, and well-designed traffic infrastructure. Community members also help pick the neighborhood's name.

At Cedar Valley, the first NDD, work to demolish the old Ward Plaza complex has already begun. The next several years will see a \$10 million revitalization project aligned with community needs begin to take shape. The project will include a new Publix grocery store, mixed-use shopping and office space, and hundreds of townhomes, condominiums, and apartments to help relieve the housing shortage in the city.

With input from the community, city staff, and other stakeholders, the city council may change zoning regulations and explore infrastructure development to encourage new private and public sector investment. These critical changes can spark the area's transformation, providing a clear path for business owners and potential developers. This strategy allows community members to guide the process from start to finish.

The Cedar Valley NDD is just the first of a series of NDDs planned for the city. The second, Cider Hill, is located adjacent to Fairmont Avenue and will be presented later this year and in early 2026. Next up will be the Berryville Avenue corridor on the city's North End, and shortly thereafter, Old Town.



Danville announces whitewater channel project

THE CITY OF DANVILLE has shared plans for the development of a whitewater channel at 424 Memorial Drive, a project that will transform the city's historic canal into a one-of-a-kind outdoor recreation and tourism destination. Construction is scheduled for completion in 2027.

The channel will run in front of the renovated Dan River Falls building, flow past Riverfront Park, and extend into the Dan River. Designed by Olympic kayaker and world-renowned whitewater engineer Scott Shipley, the course will feature adjustable flow technology, which allows water levels and speed to be tailored for different skill levels, from first-time paddlers to elite athletes. Planned amenities include public access points, spectator areas, and direct connections to the Riverwalk Trail, ensuring that the facility will be enjoyed by both participants and the broader community.

"This is more than just a recreation project," said Andrew Hall, project manager for Danville Parks and Recreation. "The whitewater channel is a symbol of Danville's revitalization. It will improve quality of life for residents, draw new visitors, and create opportunities for local businesses."

Unlike many other whitewater courses in the U.S., Danville's channel will repurpose existing canal infrastructure, blending the city's industrial past with its natural assets. This innovative approach will minimize environmental impacts while showcasing the Dan River as a vital resource for recreation and community development.

The channel is expected to generate a significant economic impact, attracting thousands of annual visitors, generating direct

revenue, creating new local jobs, and sparking additional visitor spending within the city. It will also serve as a training facility for first responders, a venue for regional and national competitions, and a hub for community events, youth programming, and education.

Funding for the project comes from a combination of state, local, and nonprofit organizations. This includes funding from the Danville Regional Foundation and a grant from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Industrial Revitalization Fund.

For more about Danville's work to make the outdoors more accessible, see page 19 for the city's award winning "Danville Outdoors" initiative.



Downtown Blacksburg to launch new retail incubator

AS PART OF ITS ONGOING EFFORT to revitalize the heart of town, the Town of Blacksburg has announced plans to open a new retail incubator at 414 North Main Street, the site of the former Cook's Cleaners. This innovative initiative aims to support emerging retail entrepreneurs, increase foot traffic, and enhance the overall downtown experience for residents, students, and visitors.

Recognizing the vital role small retail businesses play in the local economy, the town has prioritized efforts to create a vibrant and welcoming downtown Blacksburg for visitors and residents alike. The new incubator space is the next phase of this vision,

offering flexible, low-cost retail space and comprehensive business development support for startups and expanding local retailers.

"Retail businesses bring energy and character to our downtown," said Mayor Leslie Hager-Smith. "By supporting entrepreneurs and small business owners, this incubator will help create a dynamic mix of shops and experiences that serve both residents and visitors, making downtown a more exciting and engaging destination for everyone."

Downtown Blacksburg, Inc. (DBI), the downtown merchant and marketing organization, will manage the day-to-day operations of the incubator. DBI will also coordinate business support services, facilitate connections to resources, and host events to bring people downtown and drive retail traffic.

"For more than 40 years, DBI has provided positive economic impact in downtown Blacksburg through signature events, creative campaigns, and member services," said DBI Executive Director Tracie Hughes. "Managing this new space gives us the opportunity to work directly with emerging businesses, ensuring future growth in the downtown commercial district."

The 5,000-square-foot facility, centrally located on North Main Street, began renovations in September with Building Specialists, Inc. serving as general contractor and Hughes Associates as architect. Construction is expected to be completed by early summer 2026, with the incubator opening shortly thereafter.



Bowling Green partners with nonprofit to establish geographic information system for utilities

THE TOWN OF BOWLING GREEN is partnering with the nonprofit organization SERCAP to establish its first geographic information system (GIS) for water and wastewater utilities.

The mission established by SERCAP, located in Roanoke, is to provide technical assistance to rural communities, water/wastewater treatment facilities, public and private utilities, public service authorities, planning district commissions, and more to support water/wastewater infrastructure projects, community development, and economic development.

“We are very fortunate to have this partnership with SERCAP and continue our tremendous infrastructure planning and improvement efforts over the last year,” said Bowling Green Town Manager India Adams-Jacobs in a press release. “By establishing a GIS for our public utilities staff, contractors, and engineers, and taking the necessary steps toward proactive asset management, we can provide better service delivery to our residents.”

Among other benefits, the GIS will help the town identify water leaks and other possible disruptions of service more quickly.

Councilmember Jeff Voit said, “This partnership with SERCAP is excellent news for the town...the GIS will greatly benefit critical infrastructure projects and has long been a goal of the Planning Commission.”

SERCAP’s field crew gathered information on the town’s utility system in August. Once that information is processed, the GIS mapping will be built, and the identification of items such as meters, hydrants, water and sewer lines, and facilities will be identified at their respective locations. SERCAP is providing this service at no cost to the town.



Kindness That Counts: A new Ashland initiative to support the homeless

THE TOWN OF ASHLAND, in partnership with the Ashland Foundation, is proud to announce the launch of Kindness That Counts – a public education and fundraising initiative. Kindness That Counts aims to increase awareness of the issues faced by those experiencing homelessness in the region and guide residents in the best ways to help those in need. The town is leading the charge by contributing \$10,000 to this initiative, ensuring that vital outreach and case management services through the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care (GrCoC) receive immediate support. GrCoC seeks to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness through effective and coordinated community-wide efforts and services by coordinating homeless services and homelessness prevention across the Richmond region.



**Kindness
That Counts**
An Ashland Foundation Initiative

The town and Ashland Foundation encourage residents and businesses to join in the effort by contributing to the fund, helping to supplement and build upon the town’s initial investment. 100% of donations to the Kindness That Counts initiative go to organizations that provide essential services like housing support, mental health services, and job assistance.

While the Town of Ashland does not operate a housing authority or social services department, the town works closely with Hanover County, which provides

the services and support necessary for those experiencing homelessness. Through a partnership with the county and the Ashland Foundation, the town aims to ensure that all individuals in the region have access to the resources they need to regain stability.

Damascus Police Department welcomes new narcotics K-9

THE DAMASCUS POLICE DEPARTMENT (DPD) has introduced its newest K-9 officer, Marco, a highly trained yellow Labrador retriever. Marco specializes in the detection of illegal narcotics, including methamphetamine and fentanyl. This addition to the team bolsters the DPD's capability to combat drug-related crime and enhance public safety. Marco's work supports law enforcement in four key areas: traffic stops, location searches, ongoing investigations, and community outreach and deterrence.

Marco's handler is Police Chief Kermit Turner, who brings extensive experience as a K-9 handler for the department. Chief Turner – a 21-year veteran of the DPD who has served as chief since 2021 – and Marco completed their K-9 narcotics certification together in September 2025.

Funding was provided by the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant program through the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. This grant funding covers the expenses necessary to purchase and deploy a trained narcotics detection K-9 officer, including all equipment; outfitting a police vehicle with climate-controlled kenneling and safety features; special gear for drug detection duties; and supplies to maintain the health of the K-9 officer.

Damascus has just 700 residents, yet it averages more than 300,000 vehicles passing through every month. The data underscores the critical need for continued K-9 detection. The DPD was responsible for 257 drug arrests from 2012 to 2019 during the eight years of service by former K-9 Officer King. Following King's retirement in 2019, the department saw a drastic reduction in activity, logging only 33 drug charges – a drop of more than 75% in drug-related enforcement. Like many small towns across the country, Damascus has experienced a troubling increase in the presence of illegal narcotics in recent years, threatening the safety, health, and overall well-being of residents and visitors alike.



Marco's addition to the department has also received strong regional backing. The chiefs and sheriffs from neighboring jurisdictions, including Washington County, Abingdon, Glade Spring, and Chilhowie, have formally expressed their support for the reintroduction of a K-9 officer into the DPD. Their support emphasizes the importance of regional collaboration and the shared benefits of reestablishing a trained K-9 unit in Damascus. Drug trafficking does not follow town or county lines, and neither does the shared regional commitment to public safety.

Newport News hosts inaugural NN EDGE Summit

THE CITY OF NEWPORT NEWS and the Newport News Economic Development Authority hosted the inaugural Newport News Economic Development Growth and Expansion (NN EDGE) Summit on October 1-2 at the Newport News Marriott at City Center.

The NN EDGE Summit is designed to connect major local and out-of-market developers with key opportunities for growth and development in Newport News. Attendees have a unique opportunity to engage with city leaders, learn about priority development sites, and explore how they can contribute to the city's promising future.

The NN EDGE Summit is a major step in advancing the city's economic development strategy, which remains a top priority for the current administration. The summit offers developers a strategic position in the city's evolution, fostering meaningful collaboration and long-term investment opportunities.

"Newport News is entering an exciting new chapter, and the NN EDGE Summit is an essential part of that journey," said

Mayor Phillip Jones. "This administration is committed to advancing our city's growth through strategic, collaborative development efforts, and this summit is a testament to that commitment. By launching NNIsYourEDGE.com, we are providing a direct, accessible resource for developers to engage with and invest in our future."

The summit featured 12 sites poised for development, each representing a key opportunity for transformative investment within the city. Newport News is committed to engaging the private development community to work jointly in advancing its vision for a dynamic and sustainable future.

Visit NNIsYourEDGE.com for updates about the NN EDGE Summit.



Mount Jackson welcomes next wave of local entrepreneurs

THE TOWN OF MOUNT JACKSON has officially kicked off the 2025 session of the Mount Jackson 5 (MJ5) Entrepreneur Program, a key initiative in the town's "MJ5: The Nest" community business launch concept. This year's cohort of aspiring entrepreneurs is already at work, refining their business dreams with the goal of opening new ventures and contributing to the local economy.

Building on the success of last year's program, which launched four new businesses, the 2025 session is supported by a \$75,000 grant from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community

Development (DHCD). This funding not only provides crucial seed money but also powers a comprehensive eight-week training program designed to equip participants with the skills they need to succeed. The cohort will meet weekly for workshops and one-on-one mentoring, covering everything from financial planning to marketing strategies.

Upon successful completion of the program, participants will pitch their business plans to a guest panel for a chance to receive grant funding from both DHCD and the Town of Mount Jackson to help bring their ideas to life.

"The Mount Jackson 5 program is more than just a grant; it's a testament to the incredible entrepreneurial spirit in our community," observed Town Manager Olivia Hilton. "By providing these emerging business owners with the resources, mentorship, and financial support they need, we're not only helping them achieve their dreams but also strengthening our local economy and creating a more vibrant, dynamic community for everyone."

This year's participants represent a diverse range of business concepts, each with the potential to add a unique flavor to Mount Jackson's Main Street. Participants will be working over the coming weeks to finalize their business plans with the goal of opening their doors within the community in 2025. Several of these entrepreneurs will open as independent brick-and-mortar businesses; however, a few are prospective tenants for The Nest, a multi-business incubator being developed at the former hardware store at 5986 Main Street, which will offer affordable micro-retail spaces and shared amenities.



Petersburg's new water tank and infrastructure upgrades power growth



THE CITY OF PETERSBURG'S two-million-gallon water tank, serving the southeastern Poor Creek area, is on track for completion in November. The tank will provide better water service with increased pressure and storage, improved fire suppression for homes and businesses, and the capacity to support new development.

The \$9 million water tank is the cornerstone of Petersburg's larger \$55 million upgrade to the Poor Creek water and wastewater systems, which will allow increased growth around key sites such as the Pharmaceutical Campus, Bon Secours Southside Medical Center, Live! Casino, and Hotel Virginia.

"This infrastructure project is a milestone for Petersburg, which has been needed for over 50 years," said Mayor Sam Parham. "Water and wastewater systems are foundational to the growth and sustainability of all communities, supporting residents and businesses while attracting jobs and new investment."

For years, limited water and wastewater capacity has slowed projects. This investment changes that, laying the groundwork for sustainable growth. The broader plan includes replacing aging water and wastewater lines, upgrading pump stations, and expanding water and wastewater capacity for reliability and future demand.

Leaders at every level have contributed to making this possible, with grant funding from DEQ, VDH, EDA, and EPA, as well as support from the Virginia General Assembly, Governor Glenn Youngkin, and Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan.

Manassas opens first community center

ON A SUNNY AFTERNOON this fall, residents, city leaders, and community partners gathered at 8750 Sudley Road in Manassas to mark a milestone that was decades in the making – the ribbon-cutting of the city’s first community center!

The new facility sits on the site of the former Marsteller School, a place filled with memories for many in the community. For Mike Freeland of the city’s Parks & Recreation Committee, it was where he played Saturday basketball games.

“Back then, I could not imagine that this building and the fields would one day belong to residents for our use,” Freeland told the crowd. “This is more than brick and mortar; it is a place of connection, learning, and joy.”

The center will host athletic programs, youth activities, toddler drop-in play sessions and community gatherings. Manassas City Council budgeted three new part-time positions to help maintain regular operating hours, a move many residents welcomed as a major step forward.

Mayor Michelle Davis-Younger, who attended Marsteller as a middle school student, reflected on her personal connection to the site.

“I actually entered

these doors for sixth through eighth grade,” she said. “Who knew back then, as an 11- or 12-year-old, that I would one day be the mayor standing here to cut the ribbon?”

The city purchased the 20-acre property not only to expand recreational opportunities but to invest in families and future growth, Davis-Younger said. Alongside the new center and upgraded playing fields, the site is slated to house a new fire & rescue station within five years.

To give residents easy access to information and programs, the city has also launched a community center webpage and a Marsteller Park page. Both resources outline activities, hours of operation, and upcoming improvements.

Residents also shaped the project through feedback sessions and planning meetings. Davis-Younger urged the crowd to continue making the center their own.

“This is your space,” she said. “Fill it with energy, ideas, and memories that will last for years to come. Today, let’s celebrate this new chapter in our city – a chapter built on community, opportunity, and connection.”



Vienna gears up for Capital Bikeshare

BEGINNING IN EARLY 2026, there will be more ways than ever to get around Vienna thanks to a new bicycle-sharing system. Over the summer, the Vienna Town Council voted to approve four Capital Bikeshare locations.

“We’re excited to put Vienna on the bike-sharing map,” said Andrew Jinks, transportation engineer. “Adding these stations to an already expansive network that’s 800 stations and 8,000 bicycles strong means that residents and community members will have a new sustainable and convenient way to get around town.”

The Vienna docking stations will add 21 standard bicycles and four electric bicycles to the Capital Bikeshare network. The docking stations will be located at Navy Federal Credit Union, the Vienna Community Center, the trail crossing at Ayr Hill Avenue, and the Maple Avenue and Nutley Street intersection. Once installed,

riders will be able to rent a bicycle from one station and return it to the same one or a different station within the regional network.

The Vienna docking stations will help close a key gap in connectivity between the City of Fairfax, Tysons, and the Metro-rail Orange and Silver line stops. Fairfax County government will oversee bicycle and station operations and maintenance through a multijurisdictional contract with Lyft, which currently manages the Capital Bikeshare system across eight jurisdictions in the region.

For more information and updates about the project, visit capitalbikeshare.com.



Hampton Roads Transit completes installation of smart bus stops

BLENDING FUNCTIONAL DESIGN with handy technology, Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) has completed the installation of “smart stop” bus signs at more than 2,600 locations in six cities, enabling customers to get real-time bus information and more from a unique QR code on each sign. By scanning the QR code at their stop, customers with smartphones can also report bus stop cleanliness and safety issues, see route maps and schedules, buy HRT passes, and get customer alerts and other relevant interactive features.

The technology also is available for all modes of fixed route service, including the Elizabeth River Ferry, The Tide Light Rail, and Base Express service.

“HRT’s smart stops usher in a new era of convenience, innovation, and mobility,” said William E. Harrell, HRT president and

CEO, during a demonstration event marking the project completion held at the Children’s Museum of Virginia. “This innovative location-based technology, paired with visible and reflective signage, is designed to enhance the rider experience.”

The designs and technology were developed in-house by HRT staff, with signs installed in batches starting in October 2023 and completed earlier this year. These changes, which require less material and maintenance, have saved HRT more than \$600,000 since the new signs were installed. HRT is one of the few transit agencies in the nation pairing signs with this technology.



Town of Wise completes new ball field, will add playground at sports complex

CONSTRUCTION IS COMPLETE on a brand-new T-ball/coach pitch field at the Town of Wise Sports Complex. Alongside this new field, Public Works personnel will install a new playground, further enhancing recreational opportunities for families in the community.



Public Works Superintendent Adrian Dale and two members of his Public Works crew, Jason Craiger and Bret McGraw, have been instrumental in the

Town Manager Laura Roberts and Town of Wise Sports Complex Director Doug Bates have played key roles in supporting and guiding this project.

design and construction of the new access road, additional parking, and t-ball field with fencing. Volunteers led by Mayor Caynor Smith recently put the finishing touches on the new field, which is now in use.

With completion of this new field, the Town of Wise Sports Complex will feature a total of seven fields dedicated to baseball and softball, making the complex a premier destination for youth sports in the region. The addition of the playground provides a welcoming space for children and families to enjoy, ensuring the complex continues to serve as a hub for both athletics and community gatherings.

“The Town of Wise is proud to continue investing in facilities that promote healthy activity, teamwork, and community spirit,” said Town Manager Laura Roberts. “This new field and playground will give our youth more opportunities to play and grow while also offering families a great place to come together.”

York County earns national honor for digital innovation

YORK COUNTY HAS BEEN AWARDED first place in the 2025 Digital Counties Survey for counties with populations up to 150,000. The annual survey, conducted by the Center for Digital Government (CDG) and *Government Technology* magazine in partnership with the National Association of Counties (NACo), recognizes counties that lead the way in leveraging technology to enhance public service, modernize operations, strengthen cybersecurity, and improve transparency.



York County received high marks for:

- Best-in-class governance and data quality initiatives
- Integration of dashboards into planning and decision-making
- The digitization of over one million records using AI-based classification, advancing both transparency and scalability in public service delivery

“What makes this recognition truly meaningful is that it celebrates more than just IT; it celebrates the collaboration, innovation, and service mindset found throughout our entire county government,” said Tim Wyatt, director of the York County Information Technology Department.

Now in its 23rd year, the survey evaluates counties on their ability to align IT innovation with strategic priorities and deliver real-world impact.



Contact Rob Bullington, rbullington@vml.org to suggest topics, ask questions, or inquire about sponsorship opportunities.



Announcing the winners of the 2025 VML Innovation Awards

By VML Director of Communications Rob Bullington

THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE'S annual statewide Innovation Awards competition recognizes innovative problem-solving, excellence in management, citizen participation, and improved services to citizens. The judges select one winner in each of seven categories. One of the category winners is then chosen by the current president to receive the President's Award for Innovation.

This year saw almost double the number of entries compared to last year! And while we were pleased to see some new participants, what really bumped up the numbers were localities submitting across multiple categories. Next year, we hope that trend continues and that even more of our members participate!

Of course, not every locality has the resources to submit an entry in each category. But even if you're already stretched, we encourage you to find that person in your organization – or a volunteer with some familiarity with the project – to make sure your achievement is considered for one of the awards. Remember, the winner isn't chosen by which entry has the highest word count or most effusive language. Rather, the entries that demonstrate how a need, however modest,

was met innovatively to serve the greater community tend to rise to the top.

As former VML President Steve Trivett remarked on his process for selecting the City of Danville's "Danville Outdoors" as this year's President's Award winner...

"Picking a single winner has not been easy! But this section from the winning application helped my decision:

Working together, the initiative provides hands-on programs, community events, and environmental education that engages residents of all ages and backgrounds, while breaking down barriers to equitable access. This turns every park, trail, and green space into a classroom for learning, exploration, and connections.

Trivett continued, "The 'connections' across community, across generations, and across organizations and the ongoing nature of this initiative became the clincher for my choice!"

So, congratulations to the City of Danville for making those "connections" and to all the winners for going above and beyond to innovatively make their communities better places to be.



CITY OF DANVILLE

COMMUNITY HEALTH & PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR INNOVATION



Danville Outdoors

DANVILLE OUTDOORS UNITES city departments and community organizations – including Danville Parks and Recreation, Danville Public Works, Dan River Basin Association, Danville Science Center, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Master Naturalists, and local garden and school groups – into a coordinated, citywide hub.

Working together, the organizations that comprise Danville Outdoors provide hands-on programs, community events, and environmental education that engage residents of all ages and backgrounds, while breaking down barriers to equitable access. This turns every park, trail, and green space into a classroom for learning, exploration, and connection

Consider just a few examples:

- The Ballou Park Reforestation Project restored over 100 trees, engaging 250+ participants in hands-on learning. Partnering with Schoolfield Elementary, 75 third graders joined a planting event – reducing labor needs and sparking a citywide Arbor Day initiative across all public schools.
- Danville Outdoors pairs adventure-based programs – kayaking*, ziplining, rock climbing, and nature camps – with environmental education such as junior naturalist training, tree identification, foraging, creek crawls, and guided hikes. Many activities take place in non-traditional spaces like neighborhood parks and redevelopment sites, extending program impact without major infrastructure investments.

- Signature events like Ladybug Release Day engage the community in biodiversity awareness at minimal cost and support of Bee City USA reflect the program's efficient use of resources to advance conservation, education, and community engagement.

It should come as no surprise that in 2025 Danville became the first city in Virginia to earn the Nature Everywhere Community designation, joining more than 80 organizations nationwide recognized for advancing access to nature.

**For a great example of how Danville is making kayaking a key part of its outdoor initiatives, see "Danville announces whitewater channel project" on page 12.*



DANVILLE OUTDOORS



Scan the QR code to watch a news story about the program >



(L-R) Deputy City Manager Earl Reynolds, Vice Mayor James Buckner, Horticulturist Jessica Smith, Councilmember Madison Whittle, Town of Amherst Mayor & VML President Elect D. Dwayne Tuggle, Division Director of Community Recreation Jason Bookheimer, Program Coordinator Maggie Wiles, City Manager Ken Larking, Town of Ashland Mayor & VML President Steve Trivett, Councilmember Larry Campbell, and Councilmember Gary Miller.

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Communications

FACING A POTENTIAL FY26 budget shortfall from anticipated federal funding decreases, the City of Alexandria felt it had to make clear connections between budget decisions, daily life, and long-term goals. The city also wanted to strengthen the public's trust by making the budget process more transparent, accessible, and easy to understand. So, for FY26, the budget communications needed to strike a careful balance between encouraging community participation while acknowledging potential tax impacts and fiscal constraints.

To meet this challenge, the city created a centralized online Budget Hub featuring key resources and real-time updates throughout the FY26 budget season. The city also implemented a multi-channel communications strategy across several platforms including an online forum that received over 100 questions. To keep costs down, the city leveraged existing events like farmers markets to host pop-ups and held a "Budget Bonanza" where residents engaged directly with city departments to learn how budget decisions impact services.

Throughout the budget process the city ensured transparency by sharing timely updates on tax rate decisions and council deliberations. To ensure equitable access, the city distributed translated materials and conducted bilingual outreach for public meetings and printed communications. To increase reach and engagement, the city produced short-form video content featuring city leaders. Social media posts included clear calls to action and accessible language, contribut-



ing to a 93% increase in engagement over FY25. When appropriate, the messaging incorporated a conversational tone to simplify complex issues, while maintaining sensitivity around tough topics like federal funding reductions, property tax impacts, employee compensation, and competing priorities.

By maximizing internal capacity and using no-cost platforms creatively, the city achieved high-impact results with minimal spending, demonstrating a scalable, resource-conscious model that other localities can replicate to enhance civic engagement and budget transparency.

Watch one of the fiscal year 2026 budget videos here >



(L-R) Councilmember John Chapman, Councilmember Abdel-Rahman Elnoubi, Councilmember Jacinta E. Greene, Town of Amherst Mayor & VML President Elect D. Dwayne Tuggle, Director of Communications & Community Engagement Ebony Fleming, Town of Ashland Mayor & VML President Steve Trivett, and Councilmember Canek Aguirre.

Community Business Launch

LIKE MANY RURAL TOWNS, Hillsville faces the challenge of vacant downtown storefronts and limited resources for entrepreneurs seeking to grow or establish businesses. Through the Community Business Launch, funded by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the town created a competitive process that combined business training with grant opportunities. Each week, 35–40 participants came together for free workshops, networking, and homework assignments designed to build stronger businesses. The workshops – hosted by business leaders, the Small Business Development Center, and regional partners at little or no cost – focused on essential topics such as marketing, financial planning, and customer service.

Throughout the program, town employees played a central role in encouraging and supporting participants. By working closely with entrepreneurs, staff members built personal connections and helped citizens feel more confident in their local government and its staff as approachable partners rather than distant administrators.

At the conclusion of the program, \$47,500 in grant funds were awarded to five businesses located within the Main Street Zone. This resulted in the expansion of three existing businesses and the filling of two previously vacant storefronts. Beyond the financial awards, the program built a stronger entrepreneurial network and inspired community pride by showcasing Hillsville as a supportive community for small business growth.

The Community Business Launch also created a long-term ripple effect as dozens of participants gained business training that may lead to future ventures. Entrepreneurs are now more connected, the local economy has been stimulated, and Hillsville has taken a meaningful step toward ensuring that its historic Main Street remains active.



Scan the QR code to see a promotional video featuring one of the winning businesses >



(L-R) Treasurer Valerie Padgett, Assistant Farmers Market Manager Ashley Slate, Town Manager LeAnna Surratt, Councilmember Barry Jessup, Town of Amherst Mayor & VML President Elect D. Dwayne Tuggle, Mayor Greg Crowder, and Town of Ashland Mayor & VML President Steve Trivett.

Town Run Riparian Native Plant Buffer

TOWN RUN IS A TRIBUTARY of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River that runs through Strasburg. The high-visibility stretch of Town Run beside Town Hall and Strasburg Square was a problem because it contributed stormwater runoff and lacked ecological function. That all changed when Strasburg's Town Run Riparian Native Plant Buffer project transformed that portion of Town Run from a manicured, non-native lawn into a diverse native riparian ecosystem.

Recognizing the urgent need to improve local water quality, reduce maintenance costs, and enhance biodiversity, the Town Council contributed initial funding for the design phase, and the project secured Virginia Trees for Clean Water and Virginia Conservation Assistance Program grant funds to cover plants and materials. Public Works crews handled site preparation, ensuring in-house resources were used efficiently.

The town then partnered with Seven Bends Nursery, the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District, and local volunteers who designed and implemented a resilient planting plan featuring over 25 native species that stabilize streambanks, filter pollutants, and suppress invasive plants.

This project makes Strasburg a greener, healthier, and more sustainable place to live and creates an educational resource with



signage, community workshops, and volunteer planting events. Beyond beautification, this initiative directly supports Chesapeake Bay restoration goals by improving the health of headwater streams critical to regional water quality.

Scan the QR code to check out a drone's eye view of the completed project >



(L-R) Jessica Kimmons, Town of Amherst Mayor & VML President Elect D. Dwayne Tuggle, Vice Mayor Ashleigh Kimmons, Town of Ashland Mayor & VML President Steve Trivett, Councilmember Andrew Lowder, and Rita Lowder.

Community 1ST

LAUNCHED IN JANUARY 2024, the City of Norfolk's Community 1ST initiative approaches public safety as a shared civic responsibility to address persistent gun violence, mistrust of public safety institutions, and the broader drivers of violence – poverty, disconnection, and trauma. To accomplish its goals, Community 1ST embeds trained credible messengers – residents with lived experience – into high-risk neighborhoods to detect conflict, de-escalate violence, and prevent retaliation. Unlike traditional policing, the messengers operate as trusted non-enforcement figures, building relationships that open pathways to prevention. This fosters a sense of collective ownership over public spaces and daily life.

Simultaneously, the city partnered with organizations like Reck League to deliver job readiness, mentorship, and literacy-based engagement. To institutionalize these efforts, Norfolk created a dedicated Department of Military and Community Affairs to oversee Community Violence Intervention and align resources across departments. To ensure sustainability, Norfolk also hired a community investment strategist and developed a public Police Incident Report dashboard through the Norfolk Open Data portal. This tool provides neighbor-



hood-level mapping, trend analysis, and time-of-day data, improving coordination, transparency, and resource alignment.

Within 18 months, Community 1ST helped drive a 40% reduction in homicides, 7% fewer non-fatal shootings, a 54% citywide drop in shootings into occupied dwellings, and the complete elimination of such incidents in the Young Terrace public housing community located near downtown. What began as a pilot is now a scalable, citywide model redefining safety through prevention, partnership, and empowerment.

Scan the QR code to watch a video overview of the project >



(L-R) Community 1st Director Anthony Clary, Management Analyst James C. Hill, Military & Community Affairs Director Len Remias, Director of Government Relations Bryan Pennington, Councilmember Carlos Clanton, CVI Strategist Alex De Paula, Town of Amherst Mayor & VML President Elect D. Dwayne Tuggle, Councilmember Tommy Smigiel, Community 1st Director Clayton Marquez, Town of Ashland Mayor & VML President Steve Trivett, and Senior Administrator Adria Moore.

Safety Awareness Event

WHAT DOES IT TAKE to make an annual safety awareness event not just informative, but something employees ask to do again? In Roanoke, the answer is the Safety Awareness Event!

The Safety Awareness Event was created by the Office of Risk Management to address a pressing need: despite conducting monthly safety meetings, incident reviews, and topic-specific trainings, Roanoke city employees were experiencing an increase in preventable accidents. The problem wasn't merely lost productivity; people were getting hurt.

For the Safety Awareness Event, employees from Emergency Management, Public Works, the Police Department, the Sheriff's Department, Fire/EMS, General Services, Libraries, and Social Services volunteered their time to lead hands-on demonstrations and training sessions, which reduced the need for external trainers. The city also partnered with local vendors to provide equipment displays and materials at no additional cost.

The event was held at the city-owned Berglund Center where 750 city employees were given a Safety-First drawstring bag containing a Roanoke-branded Safety-First t-shirt. The attendees then circulated among informational tables and displays. Offerings included a Bio-dynamics Slip Simulator, a slippery walkway that safely challenged



everyone's balance. Employees also got to use a fire extinguisher to put out a real fire (managed by Roanoke Fire and EMS) and learned proper entry and exit techniques for tall vehicles like garbage trucks. Finally, a generous cookout meant that nobody went home hungry.

Feedback from the event was unanimous: employees loved it! Even better, workplace injuries have dropped. Fewer injuries mean fewer disruptions, reduced employee shortages, and reduced financial strain on city resources due to workers' compensation or downtime.



Scan the QR code to view a video highlighting all the offerings of the event >



(L-R) Councilmember Phazon Nash, Councilmember Nick Hagen, Town of Amherst Mayor & VML President Elect D. Dwayne Tuggle, Risk Manager Nichole Gibson, Mayor Joseph Cobb, Town of Ashland Mayor & VML President Steve Trivett, Councilmember Peter Volosin, City Manager Valmarie Turner, Deputy City Manager Sam Roanoke, Councilmember Vivian Sanchez-Jones, City of Roanoke Libraries Director Sheila Umberger, Deputy City Manager Angie O'Brien, Parks & Recreation Director Cindy McFall, and Director Small Business Development Center Heather Fay.



10th Annual C3 Engine Camp

THE CITY OF CHESAPEAKE believes that a hands-on learning environment can positively influence young people and give them the confidence they need to succeed. In that spirit, every August for the past decade the city's Division of Community Programs' Community Services has offered The C3 Engine Camp, which stands for "Character, Competence, and Capability." The program began when a local pastor, Durant Krieder, approached Chesapeake's Community Service Coordinator Michael Porter with a desire to provide life skills

for youth. Pastor Durant also recruited several men from the community with backgrounds in the subjects covered by the program.

Today, the C3 Engine Camp is a free program that focuses on at-risk youth in the community ages 12-17. Participants spend two and a half days learning basic car upkeep maintenance and small engine repair skills that they can take back to their homes and neighborhoods. Community members can also bring small engines like weed eaters and lawnmowers to the camp to be repaired free of charge.



All young people in the community are encouraged to sign up for the program through social media and word of mouth outreach. Referrals can also come from schools, courts, and Human Services. Using hands-on practice, mentorship opportunities, and real-world projects, the participants are encouraged to connect theory with practice. The curriculum emphasizes problem-solving and teamwork, crucial competencies in today's workforce.

Feedback from participants underscores the positive impact of the program. For example, some participants were truant from school when they started the program but through mentorship and learning, they have committed to going back so that they can pursue a trade or higher learning opportunities.

Through continued support and community engagement, the C3 Engine Camp remains committed to empowering youth, helping them cultivate the skills necessary for future success.



(L-R) Town of Amherst Mayor & VML President Elect D. Dwayne Tuggle, Director of Legislative Affairs David Westcott, and Town of Ashland Mayor & VML President Steve Trivett.



Scan the QR code to check out a video promoting the program.



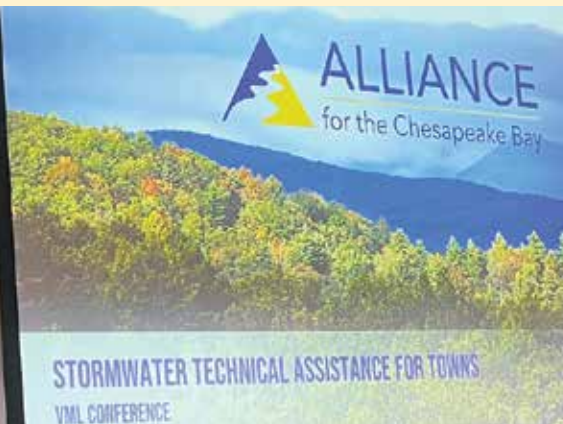
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VBCOA holds 96th Annual Conference

CITY OF WILLIAMSBURG Councilmember Stacy E. Kern-Scheerer kicked off the 96th Annual Virginia Building and Code Officials Conference (VBCOA) on September 7 at the Williamsburg Lodge. The three-day conference hosted over 250 building and code officials and included the annual business meeting and elections, awards, training and education, and networking.

Jason Laws was elected as the new VBCOA president. Laws has served Chesterfield County for 13 years in a variety of positions, including the past five years as assistant director and assistant building official. Additionally, Laws has held positions with New Kent County and the City of Petersburg. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Technology from Old Dominion University and holds 15 International Code Council (ICC) certifications, including Certified Building Official. The other officers elected during the business meeting were Kyle Kratzer (1st vice president), Dennis Hart (2nd vice president), and Nathan Young (sergeant at arms).

Cindy Davis became the 60th person in the history of the VBCOA to be voted as an honorary member. Honorary membership is considered for individuals of distinction who have rendered outstanding service in the furtherance of the purposes and objectives of the association. Davis began work in the building and code field in Pennsylvania before

landing at the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in early 2012. During her tenure at DHCD, Davis served as both the Virginia state building code director as well



(L-R) 2nd Vice President Dennis Hart, President Jason Laws, Immediate Past President Michelle Coward, Sergeant at Arms Nathan Young, and Vice President Kyle Kratzer.



as the deputy director of the Building and Fire Regulations Division. In those roles, she was responsible for the development of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code and related regulations, as well as the Jack Proctor Code Academy. Additionally, Davis has been involved with the ICC in many roles, including serving as the ICC president.

Awards bestowed during the event included:

- Kemper Elder (County of Chesterfield) was awarded the Jack A. Proctor Meritorious Service Award for Members.
- Nathan Young (County of Amherst) was awarded the Richard “Rick” Witt Meritorious Service Award for Building Officials.
- D’Anthony “D.A.” Pierce (City of Roanoke) and Bridgette McGlothlin (County of Russell) were awarded the Jack A. Proctor Meritorious Service Award for Permit Technicians.



Nathan Young and Sandi Morris.

Past VBCOA President James Moss, currently the director of housing for the Mount Rogers Planning District and Sandi Morris, former director of the Jack A. Proctor Academy, received the Jack A. Proctor Meritorious Service Award for Public Service.

More information about VBCOA can be found at www.vbcoa.org.

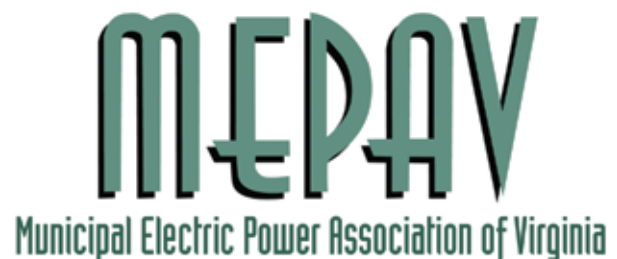


MEPAV holds Engineering and Operations Seminar

BECKY NAVE, MAYOR of the City of Bristol, BVU Authority Board member, and Virginia Municipal League Board of Directors member, along with Don Bowman, President and CEO of the BVU Authority, welcomed members of the Municipal Electric Power Association of Virginia (MEPAV) to the City of Bristol for this year’s MEPAV Engineering and Operations Seminar (E&O). The two-day E&O Seminar was held in October at the BVU Authority Training Facility, followed by a tour of the new JST Power Equipment power transformer factory in Wytheville.

MEPAV consists of 16 localities that operate electric utilities and associate members that do business with these localities. MEPAV provides information, educational opportunities, and support to their members.

More information about MEPAV can be found at www.mepav.org.



Becky Nave





VIRGINIA LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS CONFERENCE

Jan. 7-8, 2026

The Place at Innsbrook, 4036-C Cox Road, Glen Allen, VA 23060



The Elected Officials Conference is a valuable training and networking opportunity for newly elected and veteran local officials from across the Commonwealth. In addition to information about good governance, public safety, and a preview of the 2026 General Assembly Session, the conference will include Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Conflict of Interest Act (COIA) training provided by staff from the FOIA and COIA councils. As such, these sessions will satisfy the bi-annual requirement for these topics.

Scan QR code for registration and details.



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TOWN OF GATE CITY

By Mike Still

Debris into warmth: Firewood Ministry turns Helene into help

Note: This article was originally published in the Kingsport TimesNews (www.timesnews.net) on September 8, 2025. It is reprinted here with permission. Thank you to Town of Gate City Vice Mayor Kevin Barnett for bringing this program to our attention and his assistance in arranging for this reprint.

HURRICANE HELENE TURNED lives upside down across Southwest Virginia, but one volunteer organization saw an opportunity in the storm's damage.

Scott County Christian Ministries members had discussed gathering firewood to help ease heating bills and living costs for folks in tight incomes.

Two of the members, Kevin Barnett, the vice mayor for the Town of Gate City, and Michael Egan, an assistant manager at the Gate City Food Lion, already had been working together with the SCMA Food Pantry's ongoing feeding efforts for county residents in need, and the pair saw the storm's devastation as another need to be met.

Looking over a pile of cut tree trunks and limbs awaiting their turn under axes and wood splitters for the organization's Firewood Ministry, Barnett said talk turned to action less than a year ago.

"It was kind of a sign," Barnett said of the storm. "Michael has had it in his heart to do firewood and I have too. I'd mentioned it to the Scott County Ministerial Association a year-and-a-half ago that firewood might be a thing, but I didn't feel it was the time yet."

Helene made the decision for the ministry.

"We officially got started on September 27, right after the storm hit," said Barnett. "Since then, we've been harvesting from the aftermath of Helene."

Fourteen families have already contacted the ministry for help with firewood, Barnett said.

"It's growing," Barnett said. "With the way food prices are and working with the food pantry, I'm well aware of what's going on with that. Families are really struggling."

"You've got to think about the power bills and what everyone has to pay out every month," Egan said. "We thought that if we could help people out with firewood, it would take some of the burden off from power bills and electric heat, give people a little blessing and talk with them about whatever they need to talk about."

Volunteers have already cut approximately 12 cords of firewood for distribution since the ministry began working in October, said Egan.

Barnett credited Scott County Assistant Administrator Bill Dinius with arranging for volunteers to haul off several tons of Helene-damaged timber from the county landfill to saw, split, and season.

"God put it in my ear several years ago, and I didn't even know about how to get anything started," said Egan. "God doesn't work in coincidences, and Kevin and I knew each other through the food pantry. We started talking about it and God put us together to do His works."

While the ministry has gotten several individuals and the Richmond-based SWVA Partnership to help cut wood, Barnett said he hopes to get more area churches involved in the project.

"We've had the community respond in a big way as far as donations and contributions," said Barnett. "We're working on a community split-and-stack day for people to come and help. The ladies I work with at the thrift store will be preparing a hot meal for everyone who volunteers."

SCMA funded the project's wood splitter, Barnett said, and Scott County Christian Social Ministries helps with fuel costs. The ministry works on a delivery-only basis, he added, with clients understanding that the firewood is for their use only and not to be sold.

"It's hard for me to sit and get my belly full when I'm thinking somebody out there's hungry," Barnett said. "It's the same with the firewood. It's hard for me to be at home relaxing warm and comfortable and know somebody's out there freezing. That just eats on me."

"The Bible teaches us that the strong are supposed to uphold the weak. Mike and I are 100-percent together on working to make sure our brothers and sisters don't suffer if we can help it."

Barnett and Egan agreed that the Firewood Ministry should not be a one-time effort but should continue with new volunteers working toward helping those in need.

Those wishing to make a donation can mail them to: Scott County Christian Social Ministries, Firewood, 112 Library Ave., Gate City, VA 24251.

MIKE STILL / KINGSFORT TIMES NEWS



Michael Egan, left, and Kevin Barnett work with the Scott County Christian Social Ministries' Firewood Ministry to turn the debris from 2024's Hurricane Helene into heat for area folks facing increasing food and energy costs.

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Scan For More Information





Join VML

Set your organization apart in the local government marketplace of product, services, and ideas by joining the VML Community Business Membership (CBM) program. For more information contact Rob Bullington at rbullington@vml.org or check under the "Corporate Engagement" tab at www.vml.org.



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About the VML Community Business Membership (CBM) Program

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