



## Virginia Municipal League Announces Winners of the 2017 Innovation Awards in Local Government

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**Richmond** – The Virginia Municipal League (VML) is pleased to announce the winners of its annual awards for excellence in local government. The statewide competition recognizes innovative problem-solving, excellence in management, citizen participation, and improved services to citizens. VML received nearly 70 entries, from which a panel of judges selected one winner in each of six categories. The panel also selected one of the winners to receive the President’s Award.

This year’s winners are:

### **Category: COMMUNITY HEALTH and PRESIDENT’S AWARD**

#### **Winner: City of Lynchburg**

In 2012, Lynchburg was named one of the most obese cities in the Nation. Mayor Joan Foster and two local pediatricians took that dubious honor as a challenge, forming Live Healthy Lynchburg (LHL) to encourage healthy citizens. Rather than creating new entities, the program taps into existing resources and organizations and compiles them under a central umbrella website and campaign. They also signed up Lynchburg for the Let’s Move! campaign to reduce childhood obesity. After four years, in 2016, the city had earned a gold medal in each of five Let’s Move! focus areas. They are one of only 78 communities nationwide to earn this distinction. The campaign also has helped residents lose more than 12 tons of weight.

### **Category: WORKING WITH YOUTH**

#### **Winner: City of Danville**

Otters in the Dan River point are a positive sign of the ecosystem’s health. The perception of the river by residents of Danville was not favorable — partially due to a coal ash spill three years ago that made national headlines. Staff decided to change the community’s view through a children’s book with two otters as the main characters. In January, Danville Parks and Recreation and the Danville Public Library released “The Dan River Twins” and distributed a copy to every fourth-grade student in Danville Public Schools. They also coordinate lesson plans, programs, and field trips around the book and plan to install signs along the river. The project was funded by a grant from the Danville Regional Foundation.

### **Category: INFRASTRUCTURE**

#### **Winner: Town of St. Paul**

The Town of St. Paul had a forty-year-old wastewater plant compromised by age and accumulated sludge. For a town with less than 1,000 residents, replacing the facility on its own was out of the question. Instead, the town promoted the need for a new plant to its neighbors, Russell and Wise Counties, as a regional improvement. The water and sewer authorities in those counties were receptive, as they faced expansion and upgrade needs as well. St. Paul secured grants and loans for the project and designed and constructed the plant, which it owns and operates. An inter-municipal agreement shares the debt service and cost of operations. Thinking as a region rather than individual localities allowed an affordable debt service for each entity.

**Category: PUBLIC SAFETY****Winner: Town of Ashland**

In 2014, half of the hotels and motels in the Town of Ashland, population 7,500, were catering to long-term residents. Several ranked in the top-5 for the highest calls for emergency service, usually the result of criminal activity. The town also understood that families and children lived in these blighted motels and were victims of the conditions around them. Town staff, faith leaders, human service providers, and citizens worked to develop a local ordinance restricting long-term residences in motels and improve the health, safety, and welfare of people living in them. The ordinance reduced calls for service to the smallest percentage from motels in over a decade. The town recouped 244 hours of police time. A non-profit organization found apartments or single-family rental homes for 32 families (119 individuals) who had been living in motels. The town also has commitments for two new hotels to be built on the site of three currently blighted structures.

**Category: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT****Winner: Roanoke County**

In 2013, Roanoke County acquired the property of a failed living history museum adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway. The county re-opened it as a passive recreation facility but saw greater opportunity. After significant community outreach, Roanoke County developed a master plan to spur economic development through adventure- and recreation-based tourism on the property. In addition to a business plan and an environmental study, the plan has maps, renderings, and conceptual placements of desired attractions. A phasing report depicts a timeline for planning, design, and construction of amenities within the park over the next 20 years. These efforts have already yielded positive returns for Roanoke County. A request for proposals to develop the park generated substantial interest from local and national businesses.

**Category: COMMUNICATIONS****Winner: City of Danville**

Communication with citizens is a necessary and challenging part of every government entity. The City of Danville has achieved success live-streaming events on the Facebook page of River City TV, its government access channel. In addition to covering city meetings, Danville employs Facebook LIVE for economic development announcements, ribbon-cutting ceremonies, police incidents, and severe weather events. They also hosted a LIVE interview with the city manager on the FY2018 budget and share recordings with local media. Views per video can number in the thousands and higher. In the year since adding Facebook LIVE to its communication strategies, the number of followers to the City's page has grown to 11,000 followers, one fourth of the city's population. The page also has received 2.7 million video views.

VML congratulates each of these local governments for demonstrating innovation in service to its citizens.

The awards were presented Monday, October 2 at the 2017 VML Annual Conference in Williamsburg. VML President Dr. Patricia Woodbury, councilmember of Newport News, and Past President Robert Coiner, mayor of Gordonsville, announced the awards.