

VIRGINIA

TOWN & CITY

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When trust is frayed

Restoring public confidence
following a crisis

Inside:

Annual Conference Highlights



VML ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 9-11, 2016 • VIRGINIA BEACH





VMLIP grants strengthen member risk management efforts

Each year, VML Insurance Programs (VMLIP) distributes risk management grant funding to members expanding their safety programs. Funds can be used to purchase safety equipment, attend training sessions, and for special educational endeavors.

Nearly \$300,000 in funding was distributed in the 2015 - 2016 fund year. Items requested included: a confined space entry kit; heat alarms for K9 vehicles; surveillance security systems; a stryker evacuation chair; body cameras; portable worksite lighting; work zone safety signage; gas leak detectors; and much more.

To learn more about the VMLIP Risk Management Grant program, visit: www.vmlins.org.



Cover story

Most public organizations face controversy from time to time. Restoring public trust means allowing the public an open view while you're fixing it, being prepared to be unpopular, reporting successful baby steps and not expecting much credit for a while. (see page 15)

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Features



Open for business – globally

It took two cities and two counties and a lot of citizen support to bring broadband – and its economic potential – to the Roanoke region. Years of planning and research, getting the financing, and laying the cable paid off as they flipped the “on” switch in April. Here’s how they did it.

By Melinda Mayo and Frank Smith

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Meet me at the beach

VML’s Annual Conference in Virginia Beach is just weeks away. Here’s a preview of the speakers lineup and conference events, followed by a primer on the great things to see and do while you’re in town.

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Down the drain

Let’s face it. If you want your residents to start thinking about stormwater drains, you’ll need to get creative. This clever project from the city of Richmond gets people thinking smarter about what they’re putting into the water supply.

By Ryan Neighbors

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The retiring lifestyle: VRS has some new moves

Virginia Retirement System has a few changes on the horizon that local government employees should know about. What will auto escalation mean for you? Will the new LODA administration affect you? VRS Director Trish Bishop addresses these issues and more in her exclusive Q & A with *Virginia Town & City*.

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Five treasures of Southwest Virginia

I HAVE TO SAY that my recent trip to the southwest part of Virginia was an eventful one! Sherall Dementi, VML Special Projects Coordinator, and I set out to make the long journey from Richmond to Wise County. Upon arrival at the Inn at Wise, we were met by Art Mead. Art is with the University of Virginia’s Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service and, for those of you that may not know Art, he is truly an expert and strong supporter of local government in Virginia.

The first evening, Art gave us a driving tour of the area. Our first stop was the MountainRose Vineyard. There, we heard the story of the local family that developed the first vineyard and winery in Wise County. We even had the chance to sample some of the offerings! (See www.mountainrosevineyard.com)

As we continued the driving tour, we were particularly impressed with the UVA-Wise campus. Nationally ranked among top public liberal arts colleges, UVA-Wise represents a significant investment in the area and in the student population in Southwest Virginia. (See www.uvawise.edu/uva-wise)

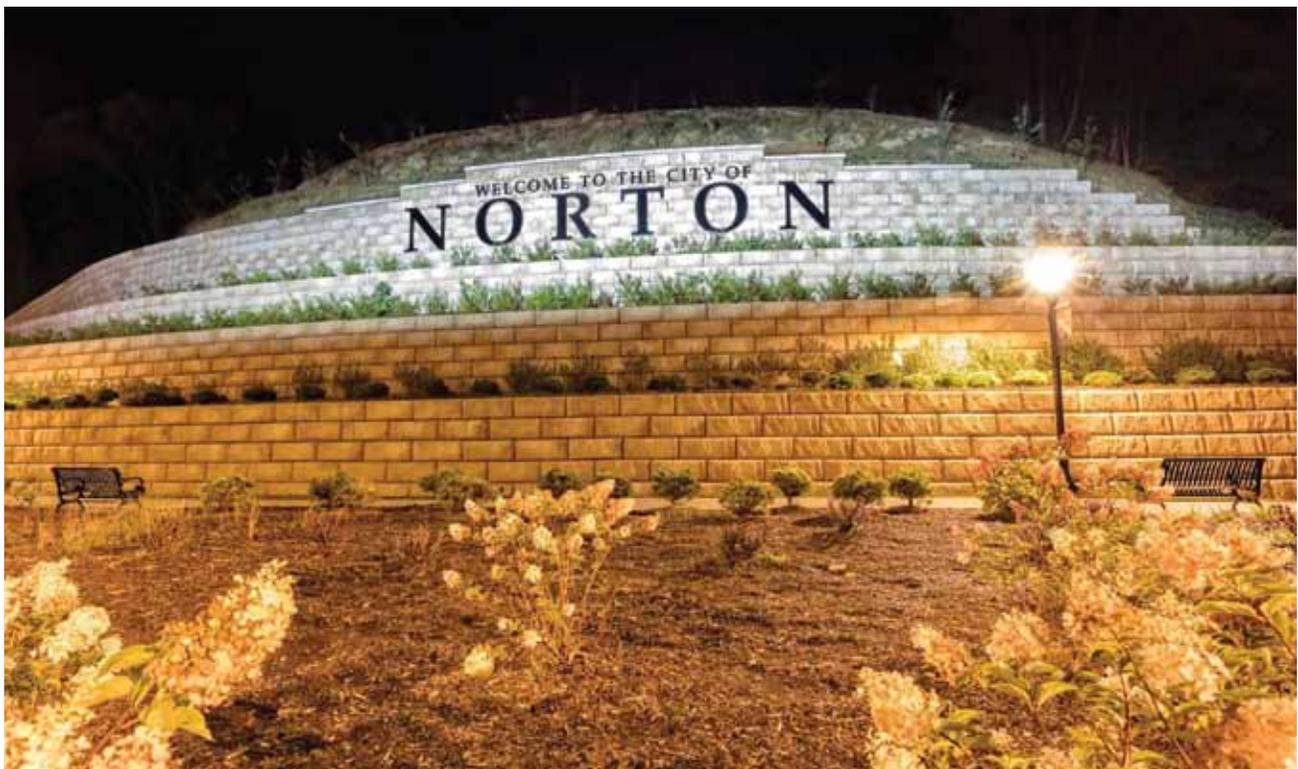
Early the next morning, we were up and on our way again with our tour guide, Art Mead. He first took us to

Natural Tunnel. Now, I had heard of Natural Bridge, but not Natural Tunnel. What an interesting phenomenon! Sherall and I were bummed that the chair lift to the bottom wasn’t up and running (but I guess that means we will have to go back again). Natural Tunnel State Park has cabins, picnic areas, a swimming pool and much more.

After stopping at Natural Tunnel, we kept going until we reached the Cumberland Gap. While it was a bit cloudy that day, we could still make out the gap in the ridgelines that became the first gateway to the west. It is a stunning sight to behold and the history there is unparalleled. Also, we can honestly say that we were in three states that day! (Check out www.nps.gov/cuga)

I have to give a shout out to the City of Norton for one of the coolest welcome signs that I have seen. As you drive into the city, the sign on an incredible rock wall proclaims, “Welcome to the City of Norton.” Built out of necessity when an embankment became unstable, the City turned this area into a grand gateway to their community. And, it serves as a walking trail as well!

In my next column, I will continue the story of our trip to Southwest Virginia with our tour of Pennington Gap and supper in Big Stone Gap. 



The City of Norton turned challenge into opportunity when an embankment behind a busy street became unstable. Far from simply repairing it, they built five terraced walls in a colored limestone texture and added lighting and landscaping to create a beautiful entrance to the city.

League hires Polychrones as Director of Member Services



- Polychrones -

THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE is pleased to announce that Michael J. Polychrones has been selected as Director of Member Services. In this role, Mike will oversee VML's educational programs. In addition, he will serve as an advocate on behalf of VML member localities with a particular focus in the area of environmental and land use policy.

Regarding his selection, Mike noted: "I am honored to have been selected as the new Director of Membership Services for VML. I look forward to developing and implementing programs designed to serve VML member localities. I also look forward to working with the General Assem-

bly as an advocate on behalf of VML members."

Having served on the Planning Commission and the Town Council for the town of Vienna, Mike brings with him a wealth of knowledge and experience. During his 18 years as an elected Councilmember, he rose to leadership positions with VML, first serving on the Executive Committee and then as President of the Association.

"Mike brings with him both a strong history with VML and the strong desire to serve our members," said VML Executive Director Kim Winn. "He is already part of the VML family and this new role affords the opportunity to work with him to provide direct services to our member cities, towns, and counties."

Williamsburg names assistant city manager

The city of Williamsburg has hired **Andrew "Drew" Trivette** as Assistant City Manager effective August 29.



- Trivette -

Trivette comes to Williamsburg from Bristol, Virginia, where he began as the city's Community and Economic Development Director in 2009 and served as Assistant City Manager since 2012. Trivette began his service in local government in 2000 as a GIS Specialist in Albemarle County, Virginia. In 2003, he moved to Monroe County, Florida, where he began as a Senior Planning Technician and worked his way up to Growth Management Division Director. Trivette is a 2013 graduate of the Senior Executive Institute conducted by

the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia.

Danville promotes Reynolds to deputy city manager

Earl B. Reynolds, Jr. has been selected as Deputy City Manager in Danville.



- Reynolds -

Reynolds has been Danville's Director of Community Development since November 2010. Reynolds brings more than 25 years of experience in local and regional government. Before joining the city of Danville, he served as Director of Housing and Community Development for Total Action Against Poverty, Inc. in Roanoke. He also was Deputy Executive Director for the Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority,

City Manager for Martinsville for nearly 12 years, and Assistant City Manager of Roanoke for nearly six years. Reynolds is a Past President of the Virginia Municipal League and the Virginia Local Government Manager's Association.

Two Roanoke officials are top in their fields

Sheila Umberger, the Director of Roanoke Public Libraries, has received the 2016 Peggy Sullivan Award. This national award is presented annually by the American Library Association to an individual who has shown exceptional understanding and support of public library service to children.

Timothy Martin, Roanoke's Communications and Media Coordinator has been named the Top Social Media Advocate in Government by Government Social Media, LLC—an organization that provides advisory and training services for state, local, and regional government agencies across the country as well as private industry. Since 2013, Martin has maximized the city's communication on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Overall, the city has 45 social media pages, with 140,000 followers combined.

Bowers served four terms as mayor

Roanoke Mayor **David A. Bowers** completed his fourth term as mayor



- Bowers -

on June 30. One of the longest-serving Democrats in Western Virginia, Bowers served two terms on Roanoke City Council from 1984-92. He was first elected to serve as Mayor in 1992 and re-elected in 1996. Bowers was elected for a third and fourth term in 2008 and 2012. During his tenure, Roanoke's government was financially stable, having balanced the budget and improved its AA+ bond rating over the last several years, despite tough national economic times. The graduation rate went up in Roanoke City Schools from 59% to 85%, and Roanoke's crime rate went down and is now the lowest in 47 years. Under his leadership, Roanoke was recognized by the Virginia Muni-

pal League as a leading environmental city in Virginia, and has consistently won national awards, including being named an All-America City six times, more than any other city in America. Bowers, who has practiced law in Roanoke since 1978, will continue to work in private practice.

Crawley passes away at 82

George C. Crawley, a longtime civic leader who held top positions with the city of Norfolk and its housing authority, died July 27 from complications of a heart attack. He was 82. Born in Newport News in 1934, George Crawley moved to Norfolk in 1963 to run the East Ghent Project, an effort to revitalize a poor neighborhood. Crawley joined the city in 1973 and served as director of social services and later human resources before becoming an assistant city manager.

Staunton hires city assessor



- Haney -

Staunton has named **Charles Haney, Jr.** as the new City Assessor. Haney succeeds Jim Gallaher who retired after 27 years as City Assessor. Haney has 25 years of experience as an appraiser. He has worked as a senior appraiser for Albemarle County and the city of Charlottesville.

Pearisburg town manager retires

Kenneth Vittum has announced that he will retire as Town Manager of Pearisburg effective December 31. He served as Town Manager since 1988. During his tenure, he provided leadership in the renovations of Town Hall and the library building, construction of the town's wastewater treatment plant and a new fire station.

Broadway attorney retires after 50 years

Donald Showalter retired in June after serving 50 years as the Town Attorney for Broadway. Mayor Timothy Proctor praised Showalter's sound legal



- Showalter -

advice and credited him with the original concept of the Broadway Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility. Showalter is a fellow with the Virginia Law Foundation, an honor accorded to only the top one percent of the state's attorneys. Showalter, now 74, will continue working in private practice.

Woodstock makes Clem permanent



- Clem -

The Woodstock Town Council has unanimously appointed **Angela Clem** to the position of Town Manager. Clem was Assistant Town Manager before she was appointed on Aug. 1 to serve as Interim Manager after Town Manager Reid Wodicka resigned.

Clem has worked for the town for the past 11 years, beginning in the Department of Public Works. After a year, she accepted a position in the Planning

Mover 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 our editor at nchafin@vml.org.

& Community Development department. After that she became Assistant Town Manager.

Former Town Manager Reid Wodicka left his position at the end of July to become the Assistant County Administrator in Bedford County.

Ashland gets new clerk

Ashland Town Council has hired **Joseph Collins** as Town Clerk. Collins graduated in 2016 with a master's degree in public administration from East Tennessee State University. Additionally, he worked with the Tennessee Municipal Technical Advisory Service, where he conducted studies and assisted towns and cities in the state with hiring. Collins replaces Dallin Kimble, who left the job in May for a position in Mariposa County, Calif.



- Svrcek -

Lynchburg Manager named top influencer

LYNCHBURG'S CITY MANAGER **Bonnie Svrcek** has been recognized by Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL) as a top influencer in government. In announcing its list of top 100 influencers earlier this month, the organization stated that the list was compiled from nominations received from throughout the country.

According to ELGL, "The top 100 is not based on title or longevity. It's based on the influence that an individual is having in their community and outside their community through professional associations, publications, and presentations."

Svrcek, who ranked 11th out of the 100 listed, is noted for being the only Deputy or Assistant City Manager to serve as President of the International City/County Management Association (2013-2014), and in May 2016, she became Lynchburg's first female City Manager. Her tenure as president of ICMA was marked by a substantial increase in ICMA student chapters. In 2005, Svrcek served as President of the Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA).

ELGL is a professional association of more than 1,500 local government professionals from 45 states.

Harksen receives outstanding assistant award

Hanover leader honored for his role in planning for world cycling championship

THE WORLD CAME TO VIRGINIA in the fall of 2015, and Hanover's Deputy County Administrator Frank W. Harksen, Jr. made sure that his county was ready to receive the world and ensure everyone saw his community shine.

Last month, Harksen was awarded the Virginia Local Government Management Association's 2016 Marcia Mashaw Outstanding Assistant Award for his success in preparing Hanover County for the UCI 2015 World Road Cycling Championships. Hanover was one of the counties where cyclists from around the world raced as a part of the eight-day competition in Richmond and surrounding communities.

Preparation for the cycling championships began a few years before any racer took to the roadways. Harksen, a veteran of local government, was named by Hanover County Administrator Rhu Harris to serve as the county's contact and point person for the "Richmond 2015" organization heading up the international event. Harksen served on both the Richmond 2015 board of directors and the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) which spearheaded local activity planning in each jurisdiction.



Frank W. Harksen, Jr.

Harksen spent more than a year reaching out to area businesses and cyclists in the county. Hanover's LOC met monthly and established subcommittees to carry out specific race-planning tasks. Harksen coordinated with various agencies to develop informational brochures and flyers; prepare notifications of road closures and detours so that businesses, schools, and community members could prepare; plan for three fan viewing zones at strategic locations with activities for fans and families; and work with both businesses and local staff on bike race-related activities.

In September 2015, some of the world's best cyclists came to race, accompanied by their coaching staffs, families, friends, and race enthusiasts from far and wide. Race organizers estimated that more than 20,000 spectators enjoyed Hanover County's portion of the event. The county showed everyone what it had to offer through county infomercials and advertisements placed in the souvenir program. Race events within the county were televised live and made available via streaming video.

The event went off seamlessly, allowing local businesses to benefit from the large crowds, and the fans to enjoy both the races and their visit to the county. The CEO of Richmond 2015 praised Hanover's LOC, saying it "knocked it out of the park" with its organization and creativity.

Residents took pride in the county's role in the races, and the county in turn received excellent exposure locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Harksen has served Hanover County for 17 years, and in local government for about 30 years. He is an active member of VLGMA as well as other state and national professional associations. He is a graduate of Virginia Tech, as well as the Senior Executive Institute. He was a member of the 2011 class of Leadership Metro Richmond.

About the Mashaw Award

The Mashaw Outstanding Assistant Award is bestowed each year on an assistant or deputy manager or administrator who has demonstrated outstanding performance to the community, particularly with a special project or during a period of unique circumstances. The award was created to honor the memory of Marcia Mashaw, an assistant town manager of Blacksburg and active VLGMA board member who died unexpectedly in 1986. 

About the author: Janet Areson is the Director of Policy Development for the Virginia Municipal League and Executive Secretary for the Virginia Local Government Managers Association.



Spectators enjoy a shady front porch view along the UCI race course.

Standard Insurance chooses Altavista for new regional office

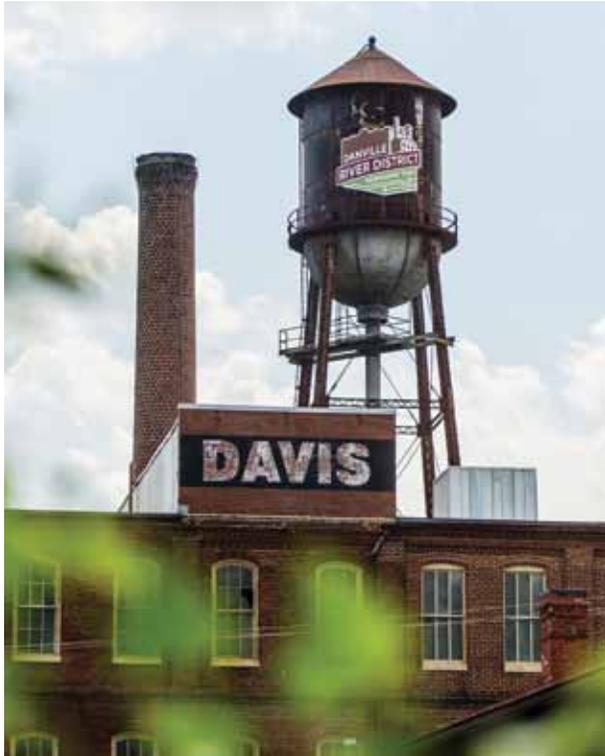
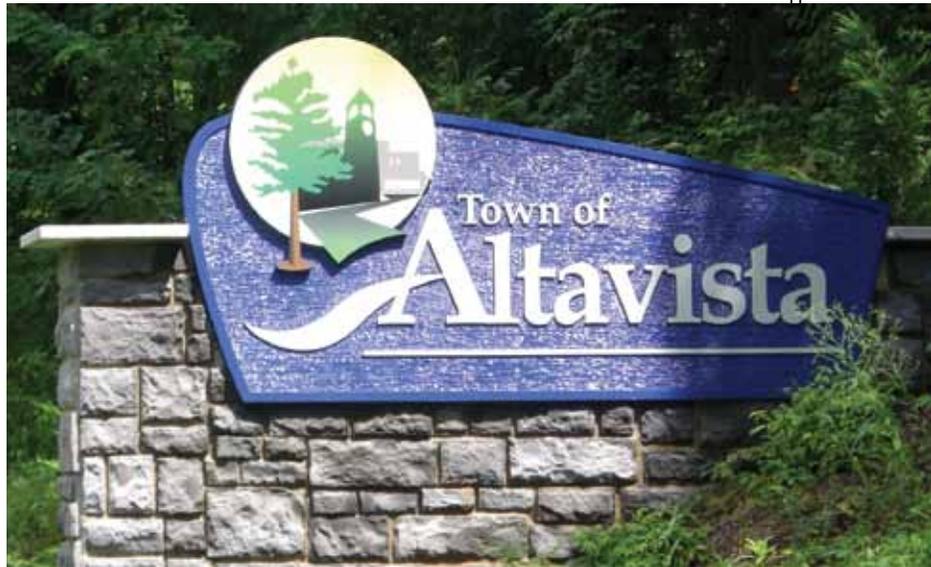
STANDARD INSURANCE COMPANY announced it will invest \$1.7 million to establish a regional satellite office in the town of Altavista in Campbell County by September. Virginia successfully competed against other states for the project, which will create up to 178 jobs within 36 months and 234 new jobs by 2020.

“We took a great deal of care in choosing this location for our new office,” said Dan McMillan, Vice President of Employee Benefits at The Standard. “In addition to the concentration of talent in the area, Altavista, Lynchburg and the surrounding communities in Campbell County are a strong match with our corporate culture.”

The Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission approved \$320,000 in Tobacco Region Opportunity Funds. Additional funding and services to support The Standard’s employee training activities will be provided through the Virginia Jobs Investment Program.

The Region 2000 Workforce Center will assist with recruitment as well as financial as-

sistance for on-the-job training with any Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) eligible dislocated workers or individuals who may be hired.



British luxury SUV enhancer sets sights on Danville

OVERFINCH NORTH AMERICA, a British-owned enhancer of Range Rover vehicles, announced in July plans to locate its engineering and production facility to Danville. The company committed to hiring 41 employees within three years of the start of operations in the region and will make a capital investment of up to \$8.6 million. The building Overfinch will occupy was recently purchased by the Industrial Development Authority of Danville in order to help facilitate the successful recruitment of this company. This deal gives this company the flexibility to grow in an existing industrial building or construct a new building as their business grows. This 15,600 square foot facility will also house a small showroom and offices. Danville and Pittsylvania County jointly recruited this company and attributes much of its success to the investments that have been made in creating an extraordinary workforce solution centered on precision manufacturing.

Choice Neighborhoods grant to help revitalize Newport News community

THE CITY OF NEWPORT NEWS and the Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority have been awarded a \$500,000 Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help revitalize and transform a portion of the Southeast Community.



Newport News is one of 10 awardees nationwide this year chosen from 64 applications, and is the only

recipient in Virginia. The target neighborhood is adjacent to the Hampton Roads Harbor.

The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative provides competitive grants to transform neighborhoods by rebuilding both public and assisted housing into mixed-income communities. The comprehensive process brings together local leaders, residents, and a vast array of other stakeholders to transform distressed HUD housing.

The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative is focused on three core goals: 1) Replace distressed public and assisted housing with high-quality mixed-income housing that is well-managed; 2) Improve educational outcomes; 3) Promote public and private reinvestment in distressed neighborhoods to improve safety, good schools, and commercial activity.

Fredericksburg tops list for entrepreneurs

ENTREPRENEUR MAGAZINE has named Fredericksburg among the top 10 cities nationwide for entrepreneurs to “be successful and enjoy life.” In the magazine’s August cover story “The 50 Best Cities for Entrepreneurs,” Fredericksburg is ranked ninth.

The list takes into account a city’s number of businesses and employees, venture capital deals, business tax rate, value of SBA and 7(a) loans, percentage of college-educated locals, cost of living, commute time, access to high-speed internet, income and population increase.

The magazine cited entities in place to assist startups including Fredxchange and the Fredericksburg Economic Development Authority.

The ranking uses data from Livability.com, which studies small and midsize cities. Chris Pilny, of Livability.com, said Fredericksburg blows the other cities out of the water in the number of venture capital deals over the past few years, with 600. He said only five other cities out of the 50 either equaled or exceeded that amount.

Fredericksburg also had the most affordable housing on the list, as well as some of the lowest transportation costs. The city had the highest growth of high-wage jobs on the list.

In another list, Livability.com recently ranked Fredericksburg 92 out of the top 100 American cities in terms of quality of life.



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Williamsburg wins grant for child health initiative

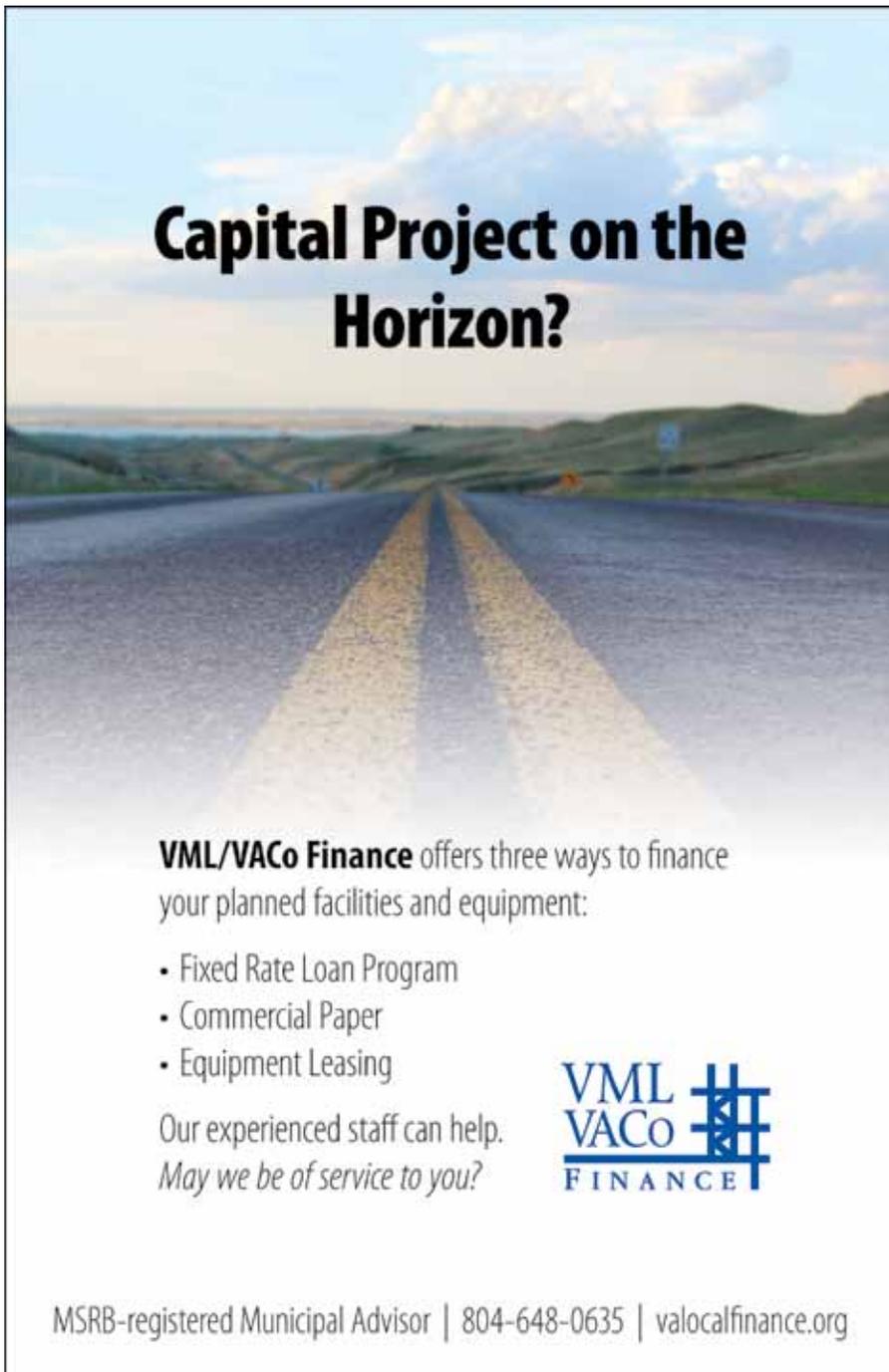
The Williamsburg Health Foundation (WHF) has approved continued funding for the Child Health Initiative/ Care Team Pilot Project in the amount of \$260,000. The project, which began in 2015 through WHF grant funding, is a comprehensive and family-based approach to address the health and behavioral health needs of children in the city. The grant is administered by

the City’s Human Services Department working in collaboration with Williamsburg-James City County Schools and Child Development Resources (CDR). A core team consisting of a social worker, a case manager, and a visiting nurse do joint assessments and work together as a multi-disciplinary team to help children and their families achieve their goals. The pilot will be completing its first full year of operation in the fall of 2016.

Top six takeaways from the Institute for Local Officials

Roughly 90 local officials – mayors, clerks, town managers, attorneys and others – attended the League’s Institute for Local Officials training in July in Richmond. The annual training covers topics from budgeting to FOIA, COIA and the Dillon Rule. Several attendees shared their top takeaways from the training:

1. “As a millennial in government, it was nice to have affirmation from presenter Tommy Smigiel [Councilmember, Norfolk] that it is ok to push your views and opinions. It is a positive thing to have new folks in office who are willing to think outside of the status quo.”
2. “Bridgewater has done a great job of making their budget open and easily understood for its citizens. This is a great blueprint to take back to my own town.”
3. “I appreciated the representatives from the Virginia Conflict of Interests and Ethics Advisory Council & Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council taking such broad topics and presenting them in a manageable and understandable way. These are both areas all elected officials need to be very aware of, and it was good to know there are groups within the state to assist us when needed.”
4. “Every local government has problems, but other local governments have probably already solved similar problems. Local governments whose officials have developed a network of contacts will be better positioned to help their communities in the future.”
5. “I never regretted what I didn’t say at a council meeting.” – speaker Jack Tuttle, former city manager of Williamsburg.
6. “It’s important to know the mayor and council’s responsibilities for coming up with a comprehensive plan for the locality.”



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Broadband comes to Roanoke Valley

AS CITY LEADERS IN ROANOKE identify strategies to strengthen economic vitality and help the business community thrive, they've placed open-access broadband at the top of their list.

Global connectivity is more than an effective catalyst for economic development. It is essential because large companies considering new locations require affordable internet ac-

Large companies considering new locations require affordable internet access with connection speeds such as 3G and 4G for wireless communications, multi-gigabit speeds for optical transport and mobile back-haul, and satellite communications.

cess with connection speeds such as 3G and 4G for wireless communications, multi-gigabit speeds for optical transport and mobile back-haul, and satellite communications. They need this peak performance to conduct business competitively around the world.

Step 1: Assembling a broadband team

In 2012, local officials in the Roanoke Valley formed a Fiber/Broadband Task Force composed of local government and private sector members. The Task Force compared the Roanoke Valley's enterprise level internet service access, availability, and price points to those of similar communities around the country, and developed a list of specific recommendations.

The list was presented to the governing bodies of the cities of Roanoke and Salem, and the counties of Roanoke and Botetourt in early 2013. One of the primary recommendations was to "identify the benefits and process of creating a more formal broadband committee structure or broadband authority to create and assist with policy development, infrastructure development, partnership agreements, and asset ownership."

Administrative and legal staff from each municipality worked with the Task Force and the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission to decide how best to act on this recommendation. Virginia Tech provided valuable research and as-



RVBA partners and supporters were given the first look at how the new fiber optic service works at the office of first fiber customer, Blue Ridge PBS.



At a ribbon-cutting ceremony in April, the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority, together with partners Ciena, Dura-Line, and Walker & Associates, brought together more than 150 business owners, local government officials, technology enthusiasts, community stakeholders, and guests who actively collaborated over the last four years to create a new carrier-grade, high-speed, open-access fiber internet network.

sistance during the process. The group agreed that an Authority structure was the best solution, and set up an organization led by a board of directors that would include representatives from each of the four communities and one citizen-at-large member. In 2013, the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority was officially established.

“The Roanoke region was able to respond quickly to the need for this 21st century infrastructure because of the history of local government cooperation and relationship building,” said Chris Morrill, Roanoke City Manager. “From need identification, to creating the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority, to designing, funding and building the initial 47-mile network, the cities of Roanoke and Salem, and the counties of Botetourt and Roanoke worked closely with the business community.”

Step 2: Finding the financing

In 2015, the cities of Roanoke and Salem borrowed \$5 million from the Virginia Resources Authority to install conduit for broadband in their respective communities. Network installation of the fiber and conduit began in fall 2015 and was completed in March.

Step 3: Our first customer

In April, the RVBA activated the new 47-mile network which now runs through the boundaries of the cities of Roanoke and Salem, and crosses into small portions of Roanoke and Botetourt Counties.

“The Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority’s network was designed to support economic development by serving local businesses, educational institutions, and government entities,” said Frank Smith, President and CEO of the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority. “We are working to ensure businesses who invest in our region reap the rewards of successfully competing in the regional, national, and global marketplace.”

Blue Ridge PBS was the network’s first customer, and the television station was the location for the press conference and ribbon-cutting in April to announce the launch of broadband.

A few weeks later, the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors approved a budget allocation in the amount of \$3,640,000 to build a 25-mile extension to provide broadband in and around the business districts of Roanoke County.

Step 4: From paying the bill to turning a profit

Participating local governments plan to supplement payments to the Virginia Resources Authority and underwrite the Broadband Authority’s operating expenses for the first six years. At that point, operating expenses will be covered by customer fees. All profits will be reinvested into the project to enhance and expand the broadband network.

The RVBA network is an open-access system, which means anyone who wants to connect can pay to do so according to a common, pre-published rate card. While the RVBA is targeting business and public sector entities and there are no plans to service residential customers, private internet service providers may join the network in the future and use it to offer services to residents.

Broadband is up and running in the Roanoke Valley, and localities are confident in its potential to make their business communities attractive to new companies, as well as allow local businesses to increase their competitiveness. Just a few months after the system launch, RVBA reports that service demand is high and early customers are speaking out in support of the service quality and ease of transition – a very good sign. 

About the authors: *Melinda Mayo is the Communications and Media Officer for the City of Roanoke. Frank Smith is President and CEO of the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority.*

The Art of Clean Drinking Water

Richmond spurs residents to embrace cleaner water practices

THE NEXT TIME you take a walk down Richmond's Tredegar Street on the way to Brown's Island or the American Civil War Center, pay attention to the sidewalk. You'll notice some changes. In a recent initiative to promote the cleanliness of both the James River and central Virginia's water supply, the Richmond City Department of Public Utilities and its RVAH2O program held the first annual Storm Drain Art Project. The RVAH2O initiative serves to educate the public about clean drinking and waste water and ways of stemming water pollution.

The contest encouraged local artists to submit concept designs of storm drains to be painted. Finalists Abby Klein, Richard Lucente, Alfonso Perez Acosta, Melissa Geedy, and Nicole Gomez won the opportunity to paint their compositions onto

drains, beautifying Tredegar Street and promoting environmental conservation and awareness.

This year's contest featured the theme, "It all drains to the James." The Department of Public

Utilities' goal for the project centered around educating the public on the impact of pollutants flowing into the James River and, in turn, directly into much of central Virginia's drinking water.

Most people are aware that chemical waste, grease, and litter harm the James River ecosystem. Fewer, however, know that leaves, fertilizer, and pet waste also contribute to river pollution. The project does more than simply provide the City of Richmond with beautiful local art. It spurs Richmonders to further research and expand their current understanding of

environmental conservation.

A panel of judges, including the Richmond Public Art Commission, selected the five winners on June 22nd. City Hall displayed all 55 entries throughout the month of July. In addition to providing non-slip outdoor paint and brushes, the RCDPU and RVAH2O awarded each winning artist a \$300 commission for their time and effort.

The winners rendered their designs onto the drains between July 13th and July 18th. Once the artists finished painting their murals, RVAH2O gave the public the chance to vote for their favorite design online. Abby Klein won the RVA Choice Award for her drain titled *You drop it, I drink it*.

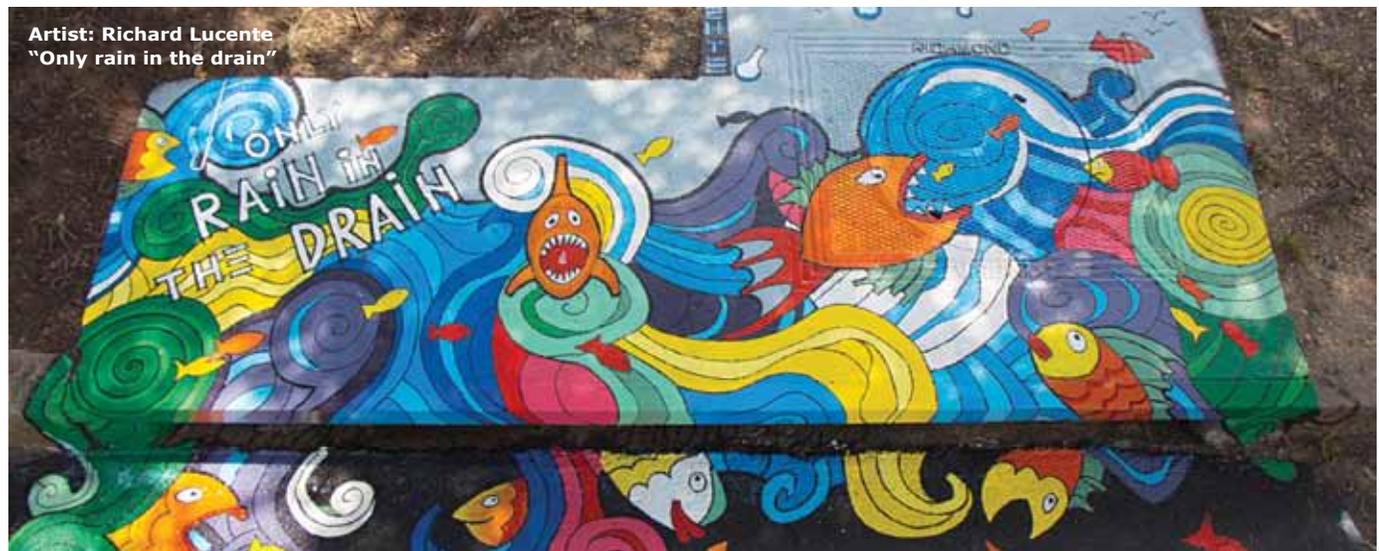
The contest is part of a larger, Richmond-wide initiative to encourage environmental sustainability and mindfulness. Just two days after the winning artists were announced, Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones won the 2016 Mayors' Climate Protection Award for the Large City Category. Thanks to RVAgreen, the first and only formal sustainability program in Central Virginia, Richmond edged out Bridgeport (CT), New York (NY), and Eugene (OR).

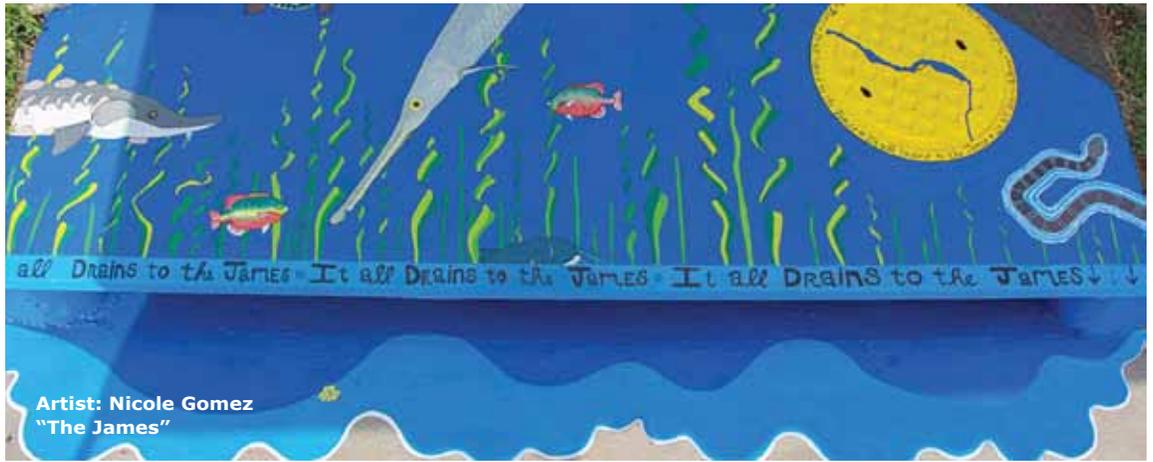
RVAgreen, created in 2010, serves as an umbrella for 55 different initiatives, which include efforts such as community gardens and new bike infrastructure.

Art is an integral part of Richmond's culture. Virginia Commonwealth University hosts one of the nation's premier art programs. Vibrant murals cover much of downtown Richmond. The colorful and unique storm drains prove to be the perfect medium to convey RCDPU and RVAH2O's message of environmental awareness. 

About the author: *Ryan Neighbors is a former Virginia Municipal League intern and a rising third year student at the University of Virginia studying economics and history.*

Most people are aware that chemical waste, grease, and litter harm the James River ecosystem. Fewer, however, know that leaves, fertilizer, and pet waste also contribute to river pollution.





Frayed relations

**Turnaround tactics
that restore public
confidence**

By James Toscano





ship

W

hen public organizations are in crisis, the ailments are predictable: budget problems, compliance issues, communications failures, and broken public trust. These problems can persist despite changes in management.

Here are five observations I learned from working with “public sector turnaround guy” Philip Shucet, as dubbed by Senator Mark Warner, while at Hampton Roads Transit in southeast Virginia.

They highlight the principles of a successful public turnaround. They focus on the first 36 months of a turnaround.

The First 36 Months

1 **Wear it on your sleeve.** Once an organization has been dragged through the mud, it won't be easy to shake the nasty labels. It doesn't matter how much of a whiz-bang is hired, how much overt controversy recedes, or how different you feel on the inside. Accept it: People on the outside still believe there's a mess just beneath.

If a situation is bad, say so. Successful public organizations talk openly about their problems because they know hiding won't solve them. Shucet says that when leaders air out problems, "You can see the organizational culture begin to change. As their courage grows, the risk of not hearing the truth from your employees goes down. Fewer surprises."

Employ highly visible performance dashboards on websites to display exactly where the organization stands on the important stuff. The advantage of the dashboard is three-fold: 1) if the only way is up, then spotlight your ascent; 2) dashboards level the playing field in terms of access to information; and 3) the dashboard creates internal focus—a clarion call—on the main issues.

On the dashboard, sometimes things looked good, other times not; but in Shucet's experience, no one could claim they weren't forthright. He insisted administrators responsible for a particular dashboard metric list their e-mail address next to it, so the public would know who was accountable and who to contact with inquiries.

Dashboards let the public look inside your organization's closet. And when your employees know the public is poking around, it can have the effect of making you keep your closet tidy.

When problems are uncovered, announce your plans to fix

them. When you've made progress or a reform, no matter how incremental, tell people. Remind the public you are not exactly who you were before the turnaround began.

At Hampton Roads Transit, we announced Mission 31/90 – a public commitment to act on 31 audit findings in 90 days. We posted the findings on our homepage and marked checkboxes as progress was made.

***The point is:** Eschewing the comforts of a private rehab, and instead doing it out in the open, allows the public to evolve along with you.*

2 **Avail yourself to the public.** It is counter-productive when troubled organizations hunker down to fix their problems complete with "no comment" responses to the media or gag rules on certain officials. No matter what kind of internal progress you might be making toward your turnaround, this leaves the impression you are closed off to hard questions, feedback, or critiques.

Successful public organizations have a culture of openness. Don't allow valuable internal confidantes, board members, or elected officials to become exclusive gatekeepers and reject policies and other practices that serve to bottle up information.

A manager's personal rapport and availability with journalists and reporters builds a better relationship, even if they have critically reported on the organization previously, and can result in more balanced reporting when things get tough in the press. When the only media access is through a public information officer, it sends the signal to employees and the public that information needs crafting.

Using social media can put an organization closer to people and ideas. Hold sessions with local bloggers to open valves of communication with influencers outside the traditional press. In these sessions, you might want to de-

In your experience, what has been the most valuable step that local officials can take toward restoring public confidence following a crisis in local government?



"Universal Crisis Management '101': Be visible, be open, be clear, take action."

Jim Spore
Former City Manager
Virginia Beach



Kimball Payne
Retired City
Manager
Lynchburg

"I believe that the most valuable step takes place before the crisis arises; that is by routinely conducting local government operations in a culture of open communication, transparency and absolute integrity. Public confidence, or trust, must be built over time through the diligent application of appropriate values and practices. Then, when the inevitable crisis that shakes public confidence occurs, local officials can rely on that reserve of trust to help them through the crisis, but only if they acknowledge the crisis, take ownership of it, correct it, and take steps to see that it doesn't happen again. Throughout, open and honest communication with the public is essential."

clare that “nothing is off limits” and allow bloggers to video, record and post interviews.

Be sure to use accessible language. It’s not good if public communications are bulked up with run-on sentences and techno-speak, resulting in a citizenry that doesn’t have the faintest idea what is being said.

Point is: *Use shorter sentences and normal words to benefit the audience.*

3

Make audits your friends. Most organizations – troubled or not – fear audits or independent inquiries. The notion of an outside organization scrutinizing what you do is enough to keep public managers up at night.

Despite these tendencies, the use of public audits is an excellent tool to help drive your turnaround. Those appointed to bring about a turnaround generally know what mistakes not to repeat, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they know how not to repeat them. A sense of clear direction can be further distorted as emotions run high, jeopardizing the turnaround. Results from an independent inquiry give you a good place to start.

Point is: *With reports and any problems in plain sight, the emotion can be taken out of a situation and can hasten the team’s return to business.*

4

Tolerate wrong decisions, punish indecision. Troubled public sector organizations are rife with fear of decision making. Managers can debate a decision to death, and sometimes such debate is used as a tactic to avoid making a decision outright.

It’s particularly tricky when indecision is cloaked in positive

terms like “collaboration,” “buy-in,” or “collegiality.” But the result can be the same: organizational paralysis.

Successful organizations embrace accountability in decision making. Employees ought to be encouraged to make data-driven, well-reasoned decisions within their scope.

Shucet says the beauty of a wrong decision is that you usually know it immediately. People have more information and can pivot. He also says that when you delay a decision many times, the options don’t become any clearer, and, often, you’ve lost time or money or both.

Point is: *Don’t avoid making a decision.*

5

Keep your eye on the ball. Don’t be distracted from your main task. If your organization’s mission is to run buses or build a highway, then run buses or build highways with laser-like focus.

According to Shucet, this could mean disbanding an employee-relations group that plans social activities: How could any time at all be spent planning and hosting organizational cookouts while its reputation was up in flames?

He doesn’t believe there’s anything necessarily wrong with these activities, but says organizations in crisis don’t have the luxury of such nonessentials. Reducing distractions in a troubled organization can help it refocus on its core mission or service.

There are enough distractions already, with all the regulations and pressure from residents and policymakers facing public organizations. Keeping these pressures at bay and staying focused is difficult and requires courage.

In a successful turnaround, be prepared to be unpopular sometimes with some people. Whether it’s that disbanded em-

“In order to restore public confidence following a crisis, the trust and confidence must already exist before an incident occurs. Localities should take the opportunity to share their many stories to educate the public on the functions of their local government. When the community has this knowledge, they are more understanding and better educated on what to do when a crisis hits their community. Throughout the incident, it is important to communicate with the public often and provide them with the information and resources they will need. Having a plan, getting the right messages out through one voice, and being accessible will allow your locality to survive and successfully communicate through a crisis.”



Mary Hope Vass
Public Information Officer
Harrisonburg

“Open, honest and constant communication is paramount in not only restoring confidence but maintaining public trust on a daily basis. Being proactive with providing information and not being afraid to talk about uncomfortable topics, or openly admitting when something goes wrong, helps humanize a local government and shows that they are capable of learning from mistakes.”



Elizabeth Minor
Mayor
Winchester

Restoring public confidence

ployee-relations group, keeping the heat on senior staffers, or keeping an arm's length from an elected official's pet project, enduring temporary discomfort may build you respect in the long run.

Point is: *Keeping your eye on the ball will help you avoid the same traps that lured others before you and have stood in the way of success.*

Not a Glamorous Undertaking

The hard work of an organizational turnaround is unglamorous. Responsible public management, including being on-budget, isn't sexy stuff. Have you ever read investigative journalism or a screaming headline about an agency that simply does what it is supposed to? You'll need to steel yourself for not being lavished with praise as your turnaround bears fruit.

When one of his teams met a major milestone, Shucet would say, "Now, give yourself 10 seconds to pat yourself on the back." They would. Then he would remind them of all the other challenges they faced.

It's not that he was ungrateful for their efforts. "I wanted everyone to be clear, we're in the public business. And as good as we feel about ourselves at this moment – and we should – the public demands even more."

Point is: *What is accomplished at the outset of a turnaround – the bedrock foundation of transparency, focus of mission, and fiscal responsibility – will pave the way for all long-term successes.* 

About the author: *James Toscano is Vice President of Public Affairs and Communications at Tidewater Community College in Norfolk.*

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Home for the Holidays

Local ornaments for Governor's mansion are back by popular demand

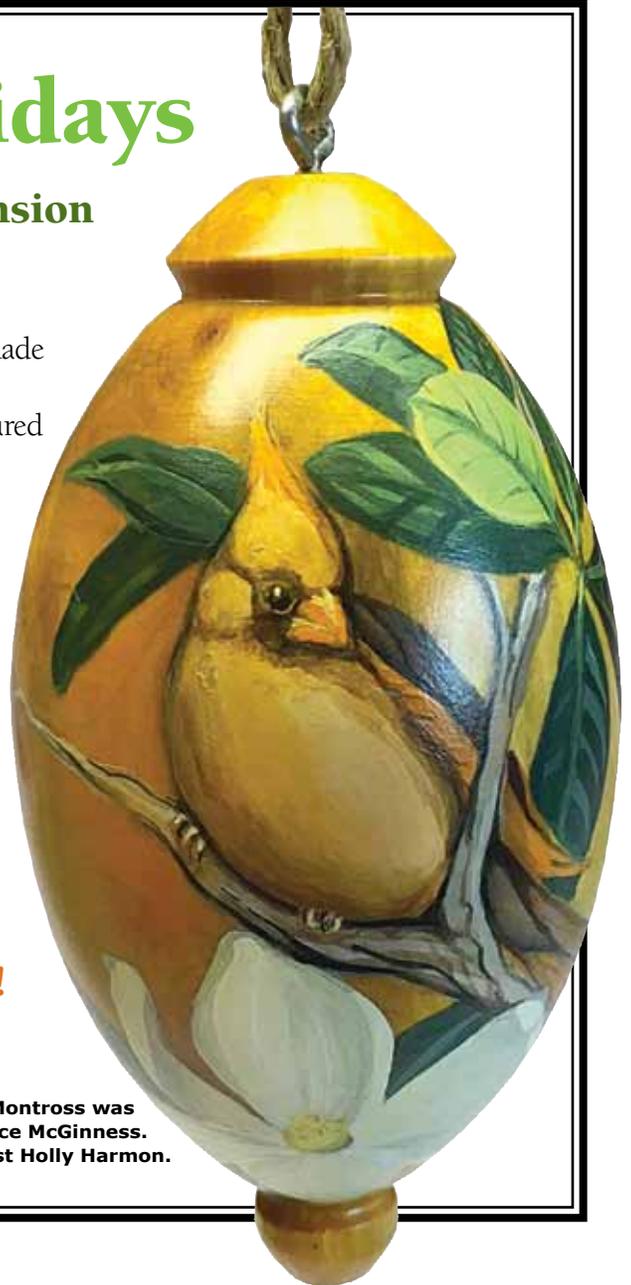
Last year, nearly 200 communities created stunning handmade ornaments that adorned the holiday tree at the Governor's Mansion. Thousands of visitors from across the country toured the mansion and viewed the ornaments, learning about the diverse heritage of Virginia's cities, towns and counties.

The tree was so popular that the Governor's Mansion has asked VML to once again collect local heritage ornaments from cities and towns to hang on the 2016 holiday tree.

If your city or town would like to submit an ornament for the coming holiday season, please let us know today by contacting Nancy Chafin at nchafin@vml.org or at 804-523-8527. We'll respond with the guidelines for submitting your local heritage ornament.

Show your hometown holiday pride!

This ornament representing the town of Montross was crafted from a local Linden tree by Wallace McGinness. It was then painted by local artist Holly Harmon.





MEET ME AT THE BEACH

Live Local

**VML ANNUAL
CONFERENCE**
OCTOBER 9-11, 2016

**VIRGINIA BEACH
CONVENTION CENTER**
1000 19th St. Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Register at www.vml.org



Registration Fees

Early Bird discount through September 16

Registration Fee	Member	Non Member	Spouse
Annual Conference Prior to Sept. 16	\$375	\$500	\$150
Annual Conference After Sept. 16	\$400	\$525	\$174
Virginia Mayor's Institute	\$240	-	\$100

Conference registration required for all events; only persons registered for the conference and wearing conference name badges will be allowed into any of the conference events.

Optional Activities

NBC-LEO Luncheon	\$40
VLGMA Luncheon	\$40
Spouse Activity	\$40
Women in Local Government Breakfast	\$40

The cost of these events is not included in conference registration. Tickets must be purchased to attend.



Location & Housing

Virginia Beach

The beautiful coastal city of Virginia Beach will serve as this year's host locality. Where the Atlantic Ocean and the Chesapeake Bay meet, Virginia Beach promises VML conference attendees a unique chance to "Live the Life."



Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront

(804) 643-3400
\$144 - \$164/night
 Reservation cut-off date:
 9/14/2016

Virginia Beach Convention Center



The Virginia Beach Convention Center, located at 1000 19th Street, is the host facility for the conference. Most conference activities take place at the Convention Center including general sessions, break outs and the exhibit hall.



Sheraton Virginia Beach Oceanfront

(757) 425-9000
\$149/night
 Reservation cut-off date: 9/14/16



Doubletree by Hilton Virginia Beach

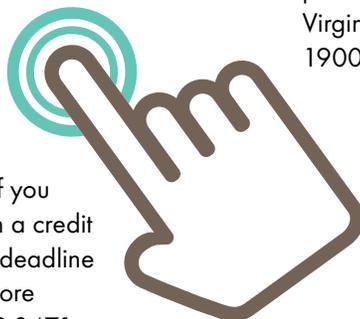
(757) 422-8900
\$139/night
 Reservation cut-off date:
 9/14/2016

Complimentary continuous shuttle service will be provided to and from the official conference hotels only.

The Virginia Mayor's Institute will take place at the Doubletree by Hilton Virginia Beach, located at 1900 Pavilion Drive.

How to Register

VML now offers online registration and accepts payment by credit card (VISA, MasterCard, American Express and Discover). Simply go to www.vml.org. If you register online, but don't want to pay with a credit card, VML will send you an invoice. The deadline for registration refunds is Sept. 16. For more information, call the League at (804) 649-8471.





Virginia Mayors Institute – October 8-9

Sponsored by VML and the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia, the Virginia Mayors Institute is held in conjunction with the VML Annual Conference. The two-day program exposes mayors and vice mayors to issues essential to

their roles as local government leaders. Covered topics will include the principles of effective leadership, mayor-council relations, the Freedom of Information Act, the Conflicts of Interest Act, constituent relations, community policing, and negotiation and conflict resolution.

Annual Conference – October 9-11

In an effort to be more efficient with the amount of time that local officials have to spend away from their communities and their families, we have developed a new schedule of events starting with the upcoming conference in Virginia Beach, October 9-11.

Based on the new schedule, most attendees should plan to arrive Sunday, October 9th and leave Tuesday, October 11th. If you plan to attend the Mayors' Institute, then you should plan to arrive on Saturday, October 9th.

The **opening General Session** takes place at 3:30 p.m. on Sunday.

The **exhibit hall** will feature local and national firms showcasing the latest equipment, technologies and services. Solutions sessions, led by our corporate members, are an exciting new addition.

The spouse activity will feature a guided tour of a local attraction. Lunch and transportation are included in the registration fee.



Host City Night will start with a reception on the tarmac of the Military Aviation Museum, home to one of the world's largest private collections of aircraft from World War I and World War II. The event

flows between indoor and outdoor space where you'll get to view the museum's exhibit space, while also seeing the hangars and aircraft collection. An all-American buffet, entertainment by a local band and a live flight demonstration are sure to make this a night to remember.

The **Annual Banquet** will include remarks by the incoming President and the presentation of the Innovation Awards, recognizing excellence in local government programs.

Afterward, join us for dessert reception with all of your board-walk favorites.



The **Landsharks Band**, known for playing alongside the Beach Boys and Jimmy Buffett, will make you feel like you are truly

in Margaritaville at Monday night's entertainment event.

The **closing General Session** on Tuesday will feature a dynamic and inspirational speaker followed by the Annual Business Meeting and election of officers. Join VML as we recognize the Virginia Leadership Academy (VLA) graduates and celebrate our Go Green Challenge, Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Campaign, and Stairway to Success awards winners.

Keynote Speakers

Monday, October 10

Matt Zone Councilmember, Cleveland, OH

First Vice President, National League of Cities
Federal Advocacy in Action
9 - 10:15 a.m.



Councilmember Matt Zone, First Vice President of the National League of Cities, will help local leaders understand the importance of federal advocacy. You'll learn how municipalities are responding to national issues. You'll hear how NLC's federal action priorities emphasize the connected nature of federal action and local economic efforts. Matt will provide a framework that empowers local governments to address the challenges we face and move our nation forward.

Tuesday, October 11

Leland Melvin Moments in Silence 9 - 10 a.m.

You may recognize retired astronaut Leland Melvin from his famous 2009 NASA portrait with his two dogs, Jake and Scout. Or maybe you've seen him on the Lifetime channel hosting Child Genius. However, his first claim to fame wasn't in space or on screen — it was as an NFL player. Hear his fascinating story of perseverance and how he ultimately traveled off-planet twice on Space Shuttle Atlantis to help build the International Space Station.



Beaches and Beyond

Things to see and do while you're in town for VML Annual Conference

WHERE THE ATLANTIC OCEAN and the Chesapeake Bay meet, Virginia Beach promises VML conferees a unique chance to “Live the Life.” With pristine natural wonders, freshly caught seafood, just-picked local ingredients, a vibrant downtown district and three distinct beach experiences at the Oceanfront, Sandbridge or Chesapeake Bay, Virginia Beach provides something exciting for every visitor.



Resort Beach

Resort Beach

The Resort Beach is home to the area's iconic three-mile boardwalk, revealing Virginia Beach's outgoing nature, with a park-like atmosphere that goes on for miles, lined with hotels, restaurants, a fishing pier, an active inlet, beach playgrounds, souvenir shops, and more. When strolling down the boardwalk, located just a few short blocks away from the Virginia Beach Convention Center, be sure to capture a selfie with King Neptune, a 34-foot-tall cast

bronze statue of the mythological sea god, or stop by the **Old Coast Guard Station Museum** and **Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum**.

Explore the ocean depths at the **Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center**, located a few miles south of the boardwalk, featuring more than 800,000 gallons of aquariums and live animal habitats and outdoor nature trail. The brand-new treetop Adventure Park at the Virginia Aquarium, is the largest of its kind in Virginia and features multiple zip lines and aerial ropes challenge courses, ideal for thrill-seekers ages five and up.

One of Virginia Beach's newest additions is the state-of-the-art **Indoor Sky Diving** complex, iFly Virginia Beach, featuring an iFly wind tunnel that provides a safe and protected way for individuals to experience the same thrill as a free-falling skydiver.

Equestrian enthusiasts may take to the sand and view the scenic shorelines on a horseback ride through the oceanfront resort area and the city's nature trails. Rides can be booked through **Virginia Beach Horseback Riding**.

Virginia Beach also offers the first beach playground in the country designed specifically for children and adults of all physical capabilities. **JT's Grommet Island Beach Park & Playground for Everybody** makes the sand-and-surf experience available to everyone.

Chesapeake Bay Beach

The Chesapeake Bay Beach, located north of the Convention Center, offers beach-goers shallower waters and gentler waves, making it ideal for families with younger children. The area is home to a marina and multiple dockside seafood restaurants that offer incredible sunset views over the Lynnhaven Inlet.



First Landing State Park

Chesapeake Bay Beach is home to the historic Cape Henry Lighthouse and **First Landing State Park**. The most visited park in Virginia, First Landing State Park is also the site of the 1607 landing by the first group of English settlers and home to a maritime forest, one of the most endangered habitats in the world. Here, visitors can paddle alongside bottlenose dolphins during year-round guided kayaking excursions in the rich waters of the estuarial Chesapeake Bay.

Today, the old **Cape Henry Lighthouse** silently guards the entryway into the Chesapeake Bay as the first lighthouse structure authorized, fully completed and lit by George Washington and the U.S. federal government. Shuck and sip oysters' right from the Lynnhaven River during

JT's Grommet Island Beach Park & Playground



Catch it before it washes away

After you've checked in to the conference on Sunday, you might want to run and catch the conclusion of the big event:

International Sand Sculpting Competition

Sculptors representing 11 countries will compete for the largest prize purse awarded in the country. Twenty-two sculptures created by 12 solo and 10 doubles teams will be on dazzling display between 4th and 10th streets on the Oceanfront. Admission is \$5, kids 12 and under are free. The exhibit and event end at 6 p.m. on Sunday, October 9.

Pleasure House Oysters' **oyster-farm boat tours** and belly up to their new Chef's Table for an immersive and unique Bayfront culinary experience.

Sandbridge Beach

For a more secluded environment, Sandbridge Beach – nestled up against the Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge – provides sheer serenity. Those craving outdoor adventures can explore the trails, marshes and the open waters of False Cape State Park and the Back Bay by taking biking or kayaking excursions or surfing and **paddle-boarding lessons** from local outfitters.

Take one of Virginia Beach's **guided kayak tours** with Surf & Adventure Co. through the calm waters of **Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge**, a 9,108-acre expanse made up of barrier islands, freshwater marshes, ponds and ocean beaches.

Sharing a border with the Refuge is the 4,321-acre **False Cape State Park**, which features six miles of unspoiled beaches in an ocean-to-freshwater bay habitat, as well as dunes, woodlands, farm fields, salt marsh, maritime forest and wooded swamps. Together, the parks offer numerous hiking and biking trails.



Sandbridge Beach

Nearby, the Pungo farming community is where much of the area's restaurants source their local produce and where visitors can pick their own produce, including strawberries, blueberries, pumpkins and more.

Arts and Eats

Coastal Food Tours – Take a food tour, a dine-around or cooking class with this award-winning food tour group. Food tours are neighborhood centric, visiting 3 to 5 hot spots in 3 hours, and include a bit of the local history and culture. Bon appetit!

Museum of Contemporary Art – Located just across the street from the Convention Center, exhibitions feature painting, sculpture, photography, glass, video and other visual media from internationally acclaimed artists as well as artists of national and regional renown.

While soaking in the island life, tour **New Earth Farm**, a sustainable and educational working farm, offering chef-led harvest and cooking classes, as well as "Food Lab" classes, where attendees learn how to make cheese, noodles, kombucha and other tasty treats.



Downtown District

Downtown District

Virginia Beach offers more than just the toes-in-the-sand experiences. Just a few minutes away from the Virginia Beach Convention Center, the **Virginia Beach Town Center** is made up of 17 bustling city blocks boasting a fun mix of shopping, dining and entertainment. Town Center also features outdoor cafes, restaurants and nightlife. Grab a bite to eat at a local eatery and shop upscale boutiques. Mark your calendar to enjoy world-class performers at the **Sandler Center for the Performing Arts**, or put your golf swing to the test at the newly-opened **Topgolf Virginia Beach**.

VML and the city of Virginia Beach encourage you to plan ahead to take some fun excursions while you're in town for the Annual Conference. For more information about these and other great escapes, go to visitviriniabeach.com. 

About the author: *John Mayer is the Content and Marketing Coordinator for the Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau.*

Retirement Talk with Trish Bishop

New facts every local government should know about their Virginia Retirement System plans

HOW DOES THE VIRGINIA RETIREMENT System (VRS) administer retirement and other benefits to more than half a million public employees and retirees? It's all about partnership.

Virginia Town & City recently caught up with VRS Director Patricia "Trish" S. Bishop for a Q&A session about VRS benefits and the delivery of services through 827 participating employers across the commonwealth. That number includes retirement benefits for employees in 255 cities, towns, and counties, 145 school boards, and a variety of other local agencies, such as community services boards and water authorities. The size of the participating employers varies tremendously – from those with one employee to the largest with more than 20,000 employees.

VTC: How can VRS and local governments work together most effectively?

Bishop: First, I want to say thank you, on behalf of all of us at VRS, to our local government partners. We are so pleased to have you as our partners in the delivery of benefits and services to the commonwealth's public servants. VRS relies on your support as we help members plan for tomorrow, today.

We also recognize that you have faced many challenges over the last few years, such as implementing the Affordable Care Act, responding to the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) changes and accommodating the demands of pension reform. All of these changes have come your way in rapid fire and have tapped your time and resources.

It's probably not said often enough, but we greatly appreciate your dedication in working with VRS as we've implemented a series of changes to the retirement plan and to our administrative systems. You've had to learn new processes and adopt new reporting practices. Although this journey has presented challenges from time to time, I hope that you will agree that there have been benefits. The myVRS Navigator now provides more detailed information than in the past. Likewise, VRS is able to provide you with the reports you need to comply with the new GASB standards, which could not have been accommodated in the former VRS system.



We look forward to continuing our open dialog and ongoing communication. If you have questions, we will do our best to answer them. If you need our help, our support teams are poised to assist. If you see opportunities where we can do better, please share your thoughts, ideas and suggestions. We strive to continually improve and welcome your feedback.

VTC: What should local governments be aware of in regard to upcoming VRS changes?

Bishop: Several changes are on the near horizon:

- **Auto-escalation** – A good deal of focus has been placed on ensuring that members of the Hybrid Retirement Plan participate in the voluntary portion of their plan. Behavioral finance suggests that one of the best ways to achieve increased levels of participation is through plan design elements, such as an auto-escalation feature.

Beginning January 1, 2017, Hybrid Retirement Plan members' voluntary contributions to their Hybrid 457 Deferred Compensation Plan accounts will automatically increase by 0.5 percent for those not already contributing the maximum 4 percent. Through this action, nearly all of your members in the hybrid plan will be participating at a nominal level in the plan. Our challenge will be to further increase these voluntary contributions. VRS provides a variety of resources to help you promote voluntary contributions. Please visit the hybrid employer website www.varetire.org/hybrid-er.

- **Purchase of Prior Service** – The General Assembly passed legislation last year that will change purchase of prior service (PPS) provisions beginning January 1, 2017. The changes may increase the cost of purchasing service credit in some cases, and there will be limits on the number of months eligible for purchase of some types of service. If your employees have periods of leave or prior service, particularly refunded service, that they

decide to purchase, VRS recommends that they apply no later than October 1. A Prepare Now for Tomorrow toolkit is available on the VRS website at www.varetire.org to assist you with communicating this change to employees.

- **Line of Duty Act (LODA)** – The 2016 General Assembly enacted legislation to transfer overall administration of LODA eligibility determinations to VRS and administration of health insurance benefits to the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) from the Department of Accounts. The bill creates a separate health benefits plan for all beneficiaries. The legislation becomes effective July 1, 2017. VRS and DHRM will communicate information to local governments and LODA beneficiaries as the transition date approaches.
- **Commission on Employee Retirement Security and Pension Reform** – The General Assembly has established a commission to study and make recommendations on the financial soundness, suitability and benefits of retirement plans covering state and local government employees, and strategies for reducing unfunded liabilities. The commission will also examine compensation

Who is Patricia Bishop?

Patricia “Trish” Bishop became Director of the Virginia Retirement System in June 2015.

Prior Positions

- VRS Acting Director
- VRS Deputy Director
- VRS Director of Policy, Planning and Compliance
- Principal legislative analyst with the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC)
- Staff with the Senate of Virginia and the Office of the Governor

Education and Professional Development

- James Madison University, B.A.
- University of Virginia (completed coursework toward Master of Public Administration)
- University of Pennsylvania, Wharton Executive Education Program, Pension Funds and Investment Management
- Virginia Executive Institute
- Commonwealth Management Institute



and benefits packages essential to attracting and retaining a highly productive state and local government workforce. VRS will be providing updates to you as we work with the commission.

- **New VRS reporting requirement** – Effective July 1, Item 489 of the 2016-2018 biennium budget requires VRS to notify the chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance committees within 15 days after an employer becomes 60 days late in making a contribution payment to VRS. Obviously, it's important for all employers to be timely with contribution payments.

VTC: If local government officials have questions about the retirement benefit structure, who should they contact or how do they learn more?

Bishop: The VRS website offers a large number and variety of resources, including news updates, the employer manual, member handbooks, informational videos and employer training opportunities. Check out www.varetire.org for the latest information on VRS benefits and services.

However, if you can't locate the answer or you need additional assistance with your questions, your two best resources are:

- **Employer advisors** in VRS' Customer Contact Center – Contact this group toll-free at 1-888-827-3847, if you need general VRS benefit information.
- **Employer representatives** – Contact this team if you have especially complex issues requiring assistance, such as return-to-work matters, or if you want to provide additional benefits to your employees, such as group life insurance or enhanced benefits for hazardous duty positions. Call us toll-free at 1-888-827-3847 and ask to speak to a VRS employer representative.

Also, we keep in close contact with VML representatives, so feel free to share questions with them that they can pass along directly to us.

VTC: What misconceptions do employees have about VRS benefits?

Bishop: Employees often think planning for retirement begins when they submit their retirement application. In reality, the retirement process should begin early in employees' careers, when there is time to plan, save and invest. As employees approach retirement, the focus should extend beyond financial goals and include planning for life in retirement.

VRS is committed to helping members plan for retirement at all stages of their careers through:

- **myVRS** – VRS is making retirement planning even simpler for your employees with the rollout of the new version of myVRS. It offers a new look and improved security and allows members to request a refund online. VRS is engaged in a multi-year effort to enhance self-service features and provide customized retirement planning resources for VRS members. In 2018, members and employers will be able to monitor the steps as members

Retirement Talk

use myVRS to retire online. VRS greatly appreciates your partnership in encouraging your employees to set up an online account, to view their benefits and use the myVRS tools throughout their careers to understand their benefits and plan for retirement.

- **Communications resources** – Information on retirement eligibility and other benefits, publications and videos can be found on the VRS website at www.varetire.org and in VRS' quarterly Member News. Hybrid Retirement Plan members have a dedicated website (www.varetire.org/hybrid) that offers a plan features and benefits video series and calculators to help them visualize how small increases in savings can have a tremendous impact at retirement. VRS also offers one-on-one retirement counseling over the phone or in-person. Call toll-free: 1-888-827-3847.

We look forward to continuing to serve local governments and working closely with you in the delivery of VRS benefits to your employees. 



Menu

- Latte.....\$ 3
- Cappuccino.....\$ 3
- Hot Chocolate.....\$ 3
- Danish.....\$ 3
- Muffin.....\$ 3
- Apple Pie.....\$ 3
- Chocolate Cake.....\$ 3
- Daily Savings.....\$ 3

If you saved that \$3 per day in your retirement plan, it could really add up over time! For example, almost **\$15,000** after 10 years and more than **\$90,000** after 30 years.*

\$14,940



10 years

\$42,143



20 years

\$91,675



30 years

It's simple to start or increase your voluntary contributions today — and just imagine if you doubled your order!

For more details, visit www.varetire.org/hybrid.

*For illustrative purposes only. Assumes biweekly contributions of \$42 and an effective annual return of 6%, compounded biweekly.

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