

VIRGINIA

TOWN & CITY

The magazine of the
Virginia Municipal League

VOL. 54 NO. 4
MAY 2019

BUILDING STRONG CHILDREN

Youth Programs
in Virginia

Region 3 Winner
Kaitlyn Hull

Region 1 Winner
Virginia Elizabeth Stockner

Region 4 Winner
Sadi Henshaw

Region 2 Winner
Maria Angle

Region 8 Winner
Luz Pinto Consuelo

Region 7 Winner
Samera Blowe

Statewide Winner
Maci Mitchell

Region 5 Winner
Lily Konopka

Region 6 Winner
Haylee Burnett

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Outstanding youth
programs

Essay contest winners

Innovation awards



Special Events, Special Liabilities



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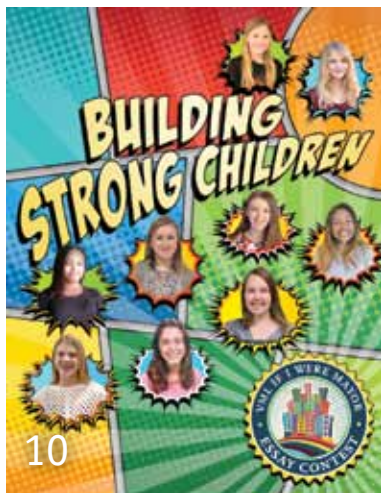
TULIP is a low-cost insurance policy that protects both the "Tenant User" and the local government. The policy applies to bodily injury or property damage arising out of the use of the local governments premises by Tenant Users.

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About the cover

This one is all about the kids as we celebrate the winners of VML's "If I Were Mayor" essay contest (see page 21) and riff on an observation made about education made more than 100 years ago that is as true today as it was then. Learn more on page 10.

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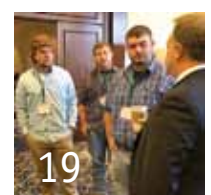
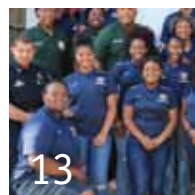
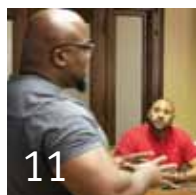
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If I Were Mayor, Regional Dinners and more

VML staff stays busy during the spring months

VML STAFF HAS BEEN going around the state recently to participate in the presentations of the "If I Were Mayor" essay contest winners. Congratulations to all our winners and I have to say that this is such a fun part of the job! How can you go wrong when our young people write about how to improve their communities and then attend local government meetings? Moreover, this is a wonderful opportunity for local councils and boards to highlight the accomplishments of their students and for VML staff to visit localities across the state.

The essays are truly insightful and highlight things that are important to children: access to food, access to emergency care, beautification projects and helping the homeless. You can read the winning essays in this issue. I hope that like all the VML staff you are proud of these children and impressed by the self-hopes and dreams they've expressed for their communities.

Earlier this year, VML's President, Anita James Price brought her Youth Council to Washington DC to learn about Federal Advocacy. This was a great opportunity for these youth to learn more about public service. Please let VML know if you have Youth Councils as we would love to get them more involved!


On another note, we hosted a Newly Elected Officials event in Abingdon in April and would like to give a quick shout-out to the Washington County Service Authority for letting us use their space and to the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission for organizing the event. The same day, the Town of Marion and the Holston Hills Golf Course were kind enough to host a VML regional dinner. Special thanks to Mayor David

Helms and Town Manager Bill Rush for their help and support. At the dinner, I noticed that one of the Town Managers had his daughter, who is a teacher, with him. It occurred to me that by attending she was supporting local government and, as a young teacher, was learning how to better explain local government to our youth. It reinforced in my mind the idea that any chance to talk with our youth and the people who instruct them is an opportunity to work on civic engagement!

Looking ahead, VML is hosting a regional dinner in Portsmouth on May 21 and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Carlos Hopkins will be in attendance. We are currently working on a date for a regional meeting in the Town of Warrenton and other locations – so keep an eye on your eNews! We know that summer is busy, and your schedules are crowded but we hope to see as many of you as possible at these events.

As we enter the summer months, please note that the VML policy and legislative committees will begin shaping VML's legislative program for 2020. The Legislative Committee will hold its first meeting on June 6 and the policy committees will meet Thursday, July 18, at Richmond's downtown Marriott. If you have issues that they should consider, please send them to me ASAP!

Finally, registration is open on our website for the 2019 Virginia Mayors Institute and the VML Annual Conference at the Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center. The Mayor's Institute will run October 5-6 and the Annual Conference October 6-8. Please make sure these dates are on your calendar and plan to attend.

Thank you for all you do for local government. 



Registration now open for attendees and exhibitors at www.vml.org.



VML connects you with a variety of networking and professional development events. Learn about these opportunities at vml.org/events.



- May 21** **Regional Dinner - 2019 General Assembly Update**
Renaissance Hotel Portsmouth, Portsmouth, VA 23704
- May 22 – 24** **Municipal Electric Power Association of Virginia (MEPAV) – Annual Meeting**
3315 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, VA
- June 7** **Virginia Building and Code Officials Association (VBCOA) – Board Meeting**
Richmond, Virginia, VA
- Aug. 8** **Virginia Energy Purchasing Group Association (VEPGA) – Board Meeting**
Henrico County Administration Building, Henrico, VA
- Aug. 15** **Municipal Electric Power Association of Virginia (MEPAV) – Board Meeting**
Charlottesville, VA
- Sept. 21 – 24** **Virginia Building and Code Officials Association (VBCOA) – Annual Conference and School**
Hilton Oceanfront, 3001 Atlantic Ave., Virginia Beach, VA 23451
- Oct. 5 - 8** **Virginia Mayors Institute & Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference**
Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center, 110 Shenandoah Ave. NW, Roanoke, VA 24016

Mellen, Bulova join VML’s staff



- Mellen -

Sue Mellen has been appointed the chief of staff at VML. In this position, she will be in charge of administration, finance and human resources. Mellen joins the League after a 31-year finance career with James City County, most recently as the Director of Financial and Management Services. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Christopher Newport University and a Master of Public Administration from Old Dominion University. During her career in James City County, Mellen served as a member of the Community Policy and Management Team and as a board member of Colonial Behavioral Health, the Williamsburg Regional Library and the Colonial Group Home Commission.

Josette Bulova has come on board at VML as an intern for the summer. Bulova will be entering her third year this fall at Christopher Newport University. She is pursuing a major in communications and a double minor in political science and human rights and conflict resolution. She is a graduate of Robinson Secondary School in Fairfax County. Bulova will be working with VML’s communications and policy teams and has already increased VML’s presence on Facebook. Bulova is no stranger to government. David Bulova, her father, is a member of the Virginia House of Delegates and Sharon Bulova, her grandmother, is chair of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.



- Bulova -

Richmond teacher named 2019 National Teacher of the Year

The City of Richmond Public Schools and the Commonwealth of Virginia had every



- Robinson -

reason to celebrate on April 24 when it was announced that **Rodney A. Robinson**, a city history teacher, was named the 2019 National Teacher of the Year. Robinson is a 19-year veteran of Richmond Public Schools and has been a history teacher at the Virgie Binford Education Center since 2015. The school is located within the Richmond Juvenile Detention Center and is one of 24 state-operated programs providing educational services to students in juvenile detention facilities.

Robinson was named the 2019 Virginia Teacher of the Year last October and was selected as one of four finalists for the national award in January. He is the third Virginia teacher to serve as National Teacher of the Year – two previous Virginia teachers, B.

Philip Bigler, the 1998 Virginia Teacher of the Year, and Mary V. Bicouvaris, the 1989 Virginia Teacher of the Year, also went on to be named National Teachers of the Year.

The teacher recognition program is managed by the Council of Chief State School Officers. Each year, the nation's top teacher is selected from among state teachers of the year representing the 50 states, the District of Columbia, four U.S. territories and the Department of Defense Education Activity. During the year of recognition, the National Teacher of the Year has the opportunity to travel around the country serving as an ambassador for education and an advocate for teachers and students.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos presented Robinson with the award in a ceremony at the White House on April 29. Robinson also met with President Donald Trump in the Oval Office.

Alexander tapped as Elkton manager

Kim Alexander assumed the reins as the new manager in the Town of Elkton on



- Alexander -

May 1. Alexander is a graduate of James Madison University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in international affairs.

From 2009-11, she was the town manager in Dumfries and from 2011-13 she served as Culpeper's town manager. From 2014-17, Alexander was the city manager in Manassas Park.

Boone-Caldwell recognized for service

Blacksburg Town Clerk **Donna Booth-Caldwell** was recognized for her service



- Booth-Caldwell -

to local government at the Virginia Municipal Clerks Association's annual conference, held this year April 17-19 in Roanoke.

Boone-Caldwell has been the town clerk in Blacksburg for nearly 40 years. She received the Master Municipal Clerk designation from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) and served as president of the state clerks' association from 1998-99. In addition, Boone-Caldwell is on the Board of Directors of IIMC and is an active member of VML. She is the longest serving town clerk in Virginia and acts as a mentor to other clerks in the Commonwealth.

Pollitt tapped as Glasgow manager

Eric Pollitt came on board as the town manager in Glasgow on April 29. Pollitt was



- Pollitt -

a management analyst in Fluvanna County prior to assuming the position in Glasgow. In addition, he was an International City/County Management Association management fellow in Templeton, MA; the chief financial officer for the city of Shelbyville, KY and an intern in Crestville Hills, KY. Prior to those positions, he was a tourism counselor for the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

Pollitt is a 2014 graduate of the Virginia Commonwealth University, where he majored in political science. He holds a master's degree in public administration/public financial management from the University of Kentucky.

Williams named town manager in Coeburn

Jimmy Williams began serving as the town manager in Coeburn on May 1. He



- Williams -

previously served as the town's deputy chief of police. Williams served in the U.S. Navy from late 1985 to early 2012. For the last six years of his time in the military, he was the senior administrator of three departments in Virginia and West Virginia.

Williams earned an associate degree in criminal justice administration from Columbia College in Illinois.

Big Stone Gap clerk/treasurer retires; new clerk/treasurer appointed



- Hall -

Judy Hall, the clerk/treasurer in Big Stone Gap for the last 13 years, retired at the end of April. Hall received the Certified Municipal Clerk designation from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks.

Amanda Hawkins, who was the town's accountant for the last five years, has been named the new town clerk/treasurer. Hawkins has been training with Hall for several months to take over the role of clerk/treasurer.

Henderson appointed as Manassas clerk

Lee Ann Henderson was appointed as the city clerk for the City of Manassas, effective



- Henderson -

April 29. Henderson has extensive experience, including serving as chief deputy clerk and acting clerk to the Prince William County Board of Supervisors and as the clerk to council in the Town of Leesburg.

Henderson has a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Columbia Southern University and a Master Municipal Clerk certification from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks.

Staunton hires chief financial officer

Phillip Trayer has been named the chief financial officer for the City of Staunton, succeeding Jeanne Colvin who retired from the position after 39 years of service to the City.

Trayer, who will start his new position on June 1, has more than 15 years of experience



- Trayer -

in finance. For the last three years, he has been the director of finance for Spotsylvania County Public Schools. He has also served as the director of finance for Louisa County; the director of finance for Louisa County Public Schools; the financial coordinator and internal auditor for Loudoun County Public Schools; and the finance director and budget analyst for Clarke County Public Schools.

Trayer has a bachelor's degree in business administration and accounting and a master's degree in accounting.

Knox announces retirement



- Knox -

Wayne Knox, the assistant city manager and community development director for the City of Martinsville, announced his retirement, effective June 30th. Knox began his career with the City of Martinsville in 1995 and became the assistant city manager/community development director in 2014.

Williamsburg retirements announced

Williamsburg Human Services Director **Peter Walentisch** retired effective May 1 and the city's fire chief, **William "Pat" Dent** announced that he will retire effective July 1.

Walentisch began his work in Williamsburg in 1990 as the director of social services. Over the years, the social services department was transformed into a human services department that delivered social services and community services programs.

Walentisch also served as the executive director of the Williamsburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

Dent was hired as the city's deputy fire chief in 2009 and was promoted to chief in 2010. He has more than 30 years of experience working for the City of Newport News and the City of Williamsburg.

Walentisch and Dent collaborated on the creation and coordination of the Williamsburg's Community Emergency Response Team/Neighborhood Response Team program.

Kilmarnock manager announces retirement



- Saunders -

Tom Saunders, Town Manager for Kilmarnock for the last ten years, announced his retirement effective June 30. Saunders was appointed manager in Kilmarnock in May of 2009. Prior to that he had a nearly 30-year career in resort management and development on the Northern Neck and Eastern Shore.

Leesburg Director of Information Technology appointed

Jakub "Kuba" Jedrzejczak has been appointed as the new director of information technology for the Town of Leesburg.



- Jedrzejczak -

For the last 13 years, Jedrzejczak has worked for Loudoun County. He also successfully operated his own IT company in Poland for five years, before emigrating to the United States in 2002.

Jedrzejczak received his degree in Information Technology and Econometrics from the University of Szczecin in Poland in 2002. In 2010, he graduated from Leadership Loudoun and holds multiple technology and management certifications including Certified Specialist in Management Leadership (CSML), Certified Scrum Master (CSM), and Laserfiche Certified Professional Program (CPP).

Governor appoints local officials to state boards

Governor Ralph Northam has appointed or reappointed local officials to various state boards and commissions.

Michael D. Redifer has been reappointed to the Board for Contractors. Redifer is the building official in Newport News.

Mark Peterson has been appointed to the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin. Peterson is the deputy general manager of administration for Loudoun County.

Keith Perrigan has been reappointed to the Board of Trustees of the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center. Perrigan is the superintendent of Bristol Public Schools.

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ACROSS OUR GREAT VA

A three-way blind interview series conducted via email that seeks to remind our readers that wherever you go in the Commonwealth, you find connections that make us all Virginians.



John McGlennon is a professor at William & Mary, an author of several political books and, most significant for the purposes of this interview, member of the Board of Supervisors of James City County, VA.

Mary Person has earned many titles including principal, minister of music, councilwoman, VML committee member and, most salient for this interview, Mayor of Emporia, VA.



VTC: What's something you get asked a lot as an elected official?

John: When are my neighborhood's roads going to be resurfaced?

Mary: Why is my water bill so high?

VTC: John, what county bill or fee do you think is least understood and/or drives the most complaints from residents?

John: Probably the fee we charge for bulk yard waste pickup and disposal. We do not provide solid waste service, and when a storm generates a lot of debris the lack of FEMA funding means we can't offer pickup services. We get complaints about having to pay for disposal.

VTC: Mary, do you and the council get many complaints or requests related to the roads in Emporia?

Mary: We do not get a lot of complaints about the roads; we try to maintain our roads and fix problems as they occur. Our City Manager has a motto "all eyes on the City" for all city employees and that helps with problems that may occur.

VTC: What is the most unusual question or request you've received as an elected official?

John: A request from property owners to help them get a supplemental tax district created to repair the dam their properties surround.

Mary: Can you tell the school band to stop beating those drums so loud?

VTC: John, who is your favorite drummer of all time? Why?

John: Probably Ginger Baker from his days with Cream, because my musical taste is stuck in the late 1960s.

VTC: Mary, how do you balance the needs of the silent many against the demands of the vocal few?

Mary: The people who would never come to a Council meeting will often stop me in the grocery store, at church, at different functions or any place, they may see me to voice their concerns, needs or wants.

VTC: When you were new to the role, what did you find most surprising about the job?

John: I was surprised by the high volume of reading material

Mary: I was surprised that many people did not understand the role of the Mayor in a council-manager form of government.

VTC: John, if I didn't know anything about how county governments work, how would you explain to me the role of the county board of supervisors?

John: The Board of Supervisors is an elected governing body responsible for making policy for Virginia's counties. It adopts a budget, sets tax rates (especially on real estate), adopts county ordinances and regulates land use, health, safety and the quality of life in our communities as permitted by the Commonwealth.

VTC: Mary, do you have a favorite book that has inspired or informed your work as mayor?

Mary: The Bible.

VTC: What's your favorite kind of question to be asked by members of your community?

John: Who can I thank for the great service I received from county staff?

Mary: What are you doing for us in terms of jobs?

VTC: John, what's an example of something the county has done to bring more jobs into the area?

John: We have supported our historic and other tourism venues with funds for programming and marketing.

VTC: Mary, what's the nicest compliment or "thank-you" you've received as mayor?

Mary: Most people are just appreciative that you take the time to listen and do whatever you can to help resolve their situation. So, the simple "thank you's" mean a lot to me.

VTC: Imagine you had to temporarily perform your duties in a completely different part of the state. What's something you'd want to know before you got there?

John: What are some good places to run into citizens?

Mary: What projects are you working on?

VTC: John, what's your favorite project that the board is currently working on?

John: Purchase of Development Rights to preserve from development lands that are historic or environmentally sensitive, retain a rural character or protect a scenic vista.

VTC: Mary, what are your favorite places in Emporia to interact with citizens?

Mary: I love to interact with citizens anywhere they may be. However, if I had to choose it would be the grocery stores, they are like the meeting place in Emporia.

Kids make a difference in Leesburg Town to end use of herbicide

THE LEESBURG TOWN COUNCIL voted in late April to stop the practice of using glyphosate, a widely-used herbicide. Some studies have linked glyphosate to an increase in cancer along with controlling vegetation in some areas of the town, including along a man-made waterway that must be kept clear of weeds under federal law.

The town's Environmental Advisory Committee started raising the issue several years ago when town residents had made presentations to council. This year the proponents received some formidable help from two preteen residents. Aila McGregor, testified to council at its April 9 meeting asking that the use of the

herbicide be discontinued. McGregor also presented the results of an online petition that she initiated on the issue. Elias Brock, another young resident of the town, read a poem that he had written about the use of the substance.

The council at a subsequent meeting voted to end the use of glyphosate. Town staff are looking at other methods to keep the channel clear, including using goats!



Norfolk rolls out new mentorship program

THE CITY OF NORFOLK'S Department of Recreation, Parks & Open Space held the first of several mentorship programs,

named #TURNT, on April 6 at the Norfolk Boxing Center. The purpose of #TURNT (Transforming, Unifying, Recognizing Norfolk Teens) is to teach leadership, life skills, and

personal development by engaging in physical fitness and team building in a fun and interactive environment. Over 65 Norfolk youth attended the April meeting.

According to a city media release, the April session opened with remarks from Mayor Kenneth Cooper Alexander, Councilman Paul Riddick, Councilwoman Andria McClellan, Councilwoman Courtney Doyle, Sheriff Joe Baron, and Director of Recreation, Parks & Open Space Darrell Crittendon. Hank and Sandra Sawyer (Lake Taylor High School Football, and Girls Basketball coaches, respectively), facilitated a session on leadership, character, emotional intelligence, and the importance of having a high moral compass and being a person of influence. Coach Mustafa McDowell of Team Norfolk Boxing also provided a boxing demo and tips on conflict resolution.

Additional #TURNT sessions will take place monthly through September at locations throughout the city.



Hampton offers emergency preparedness course for teens



TEENAGERS IN HAMPTON had the opportunity to learn how to save lives and property during a one-day emergency preparedness course scheduled for Saturday, May 4 at a city fire station.

Sponsored by Hampton's Citizens' Unity Commission and the Office of Emergency Management; Community Emergency Response Team training for youth will teach them about fire safety, disaster medical assistance, and more.

Professional emergency service personnel - including firefighters and police - are often the first line of defense in a disaster. However, because firefighters and police may not be able to help everyone immediately, people with CERT training can use what they are taught to help their family or neighbors until more help arrives.

CERT training for adults is a multi-day program. The training for young people was scheduled to be a one-day training program for up to 30 youth.

Additional information about the CERT program for adults is posted at <https://hampton.gov/1724/CERT>.

New Market celebrates opening of pocket park

THE TOWN OF NEW MARKET and two property owners realized the fruits of their labor in late April with the opening of a pocket park in the downtown area. An unused space between two buildings has been turned into an area where people can enjoy some green space and relax downtown.

The property owners – Jim Weissenborn, an attorney, and Mark Sweeney, a local business owner – had been negotiating a partnership with the town for years for the use of the space between their two buildings, according to an April 23 article in the *Northern Virginia Daily*.

The project kicked off with Sweeney’s restoration of The Henkel Press sign painted on the side of the building on one side of the park. Over the last several months, trees were removed, and hardscaping and landscaping activities were undertaken.



RICH COOLEY / FOR THE DNAR

Mark Sweeney, of New Market, waters the shrubbery inside the town’s new pocket park on South Congress Street.



Watershed communities to celebrate Chesapeake Bay Awareness Week

THE FOURTH ANNUAL Chesapeake Bay Awareness Week will take place June 1-9, 2019. While this week has been officially designated in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, events will take place throughout the entire watershed to raise awareness about this valuable economic and environmental resource – a national treasure that directly connects over 18 million people.

In 2016, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative commission that advises members of the state legislatures in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia on matters of Bay-wide concern, championed the idea of designating a week in June as

Chesapeake Bay Awareness Week. The designation encourages all who reside in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia to commemorate Chesapeake Bay Awareness Week with events, activities and educational programs to acknowledge the significance of the Chesapeake Bay.

Events spanning the watershed will be posted on the Chesapeake Bay Program’s Attend an Event webpage (<https://www.chesapeakebay.net/action/attend>) beginning in late May 2019. If you’d like to have your event included, please send it to Rebecca Chillrud at rchillrud@chesapeakebay.net.

City launches official ‘Danville VA’ mobile app

THE CITY OF DANVILLE has rolled out a new free mobile app that puts city hall at the fingertips of residents and visitors. The app is available in the Apple iTunes app store and the Android Google Play store. The official “Danville, VA” app includes features that allow citizens to access city officials and services, report a variety of non-emergency issues, and keep abreast of the latest happenings through social media.

The app provides handy access to hot-line numbers for power outages, water, and gas emergencies. As well as providing contact information for other urgent matters



such as trees and debris blocking streets, blocked storm drains, and inoperative traffic signals. Residents and visitors can report damaged curb/sidewalks, dead animal pickup, graffiti, potholes, street sign repairs, and unsafe/blighted buildings. They can snap photos of issues and send them directly to city staff. These issues are then tracked with notifications sent as progress is made to correct the issues. Furthermore, the app contains information on city museums, parks, trails, and other attractions. The “Danville, VA” app also includes information on the unique heritage of the city through storybook maps.

Vienna Community Center receives LEED certification

THE RECENTLY RENOVATED Vienna Community Center has received gold-level LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification through the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). The LEED program provides a framework to create healthy, highly efficient, and cost-saving green buildings. The recreation facility is located adjacent to the W&OD Trail and is in the heart of the Town of Vienna.

The Vienna Community Center attained gold-level certification through its new construction/major renovation project, which was completed in 2017. The center scored 62 of 110 possible LEED points, qualifying the building and construction project for the second-highest rating available through the USGBC program. RRMM Lukmire Architects managed the LEED certification process for this project.

The community center attained LEED points in categories including alternative transportation – public transportation access and parking capacity, stormwater design quality control, water efficient landscaping, optimizing energy performance, use of recycled and low-emitting materials, having a green housekeeping management plan, construction waste management, and building reuse – maintaining existing walls, floors, and roof.



Photo by Adam Kincaid,
Town of Vienna

NOVA region promotes glass recovery and recycling

THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, Arlington County, Fairfax County, and Prince William County have announced a new strategic partnership to improve glass recovery and recycling, according to a recent media release from the City of Alexandria. These jurisdictions have committed to collecting glass via purple glass-only drop-off containers. The glass will then be transported



to a Fairfax County processing plant, where it will be recycled into a variety of products.

Once glass is brought to Fairfax County's processing plant, machinery recovers any metal (such as bottle caps), crushes the glass, removes labels and other detritus, and then screens the product into various grades of sand and gravel. The plant is capable of pulverizing glass bottles and jars into sand and gravel that can be used for paving, construction and landscaping.

Currently, glass collected in curbside recycling bins in Northern Virginia is sent to recycling facilities. However, during transportation to the facility, glass is broken and becomes mixed with recycling residue (such as small bits of plastic and paper) during the sorting process. This recycling contamination, along with rising recycling costs and the lack of a market for single-stream processed glass, has made glass unrecoverable. The new glass-only drop-off containers address this issue by diverting glass recyclables to a specialized plant for responsible recycling. Alexandria, Arlington County and Fairfax County will each have glass-only purple drop-off bins at locations in the jurisdictions.

BUILDING STRONG CHILDREN

Youth Programs in Virginia

ONE OF THE THINGS that people from all walks of life, from all over the world, have in common is that we love our children. We want them to be happy, healthy and to succeed. It's no surprise then that in democratic societies such as ours, in which the functions of government are meant to mirror the priorities of the citizenry, that the support and betterment of children should figure prominently in the government's policies and programs. Nowhere is this more evident than in local governments. Consider, for example, the degree to which a local government's budget is dedicated to schools and the attendant expenses associated with educating young people. Even more telling is the almost universal agreement that these expenditures are for the common good. As Frederick Douglass, a lifelong advocate of education, opined: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

But it has never been easy to build strong children. This was true in Mr. Douglass' day and it remains true today. Thankfully, communities across Virginia are finding innovative ways to ensure that their children do not fall between society's cracks and become broken men and women. While it isn't possible to feature all the wonderful youth programs achieving positive results across the state, we're proud to use this issue of *Virginia Town & City* to highlight several deserving of recognition for thinking outside the box, tackling tough problems and offering opportunities to Virginia's youth.

We hope you will enjoy learning about:

- **Project Imagine:** The City of Danville has found a way to keep at risk youths out of gangs and on the path to imagining a better future for themselves and their community. Arnold Hendrix tells us all about it.
- **Job Shadowing Academy:** The City of Petersburg is on to something. What better way to teach young people to care about their community than to have them learn how the people who make it work do their jobs? Kemi Osaba explains.
- **Camp L.I.T.:** The City of Harrisonburg is where young women have the opportunity to not only become more confident about themselves and their future, they also learn how to put out fires and save lives. Lt. Erin Stehle outlines the advantages of teaching girls to become firefighters.
- **Youth Summit:** The City of Roanoke started listening to what their kids said they needed to succeed, and the results have been good for the kids, good for the grownups and good for the city. Aisha Johnson provides some background.
- **High School Technical Training Program (HSTTP):** VBCOA is the perfect Virginia champion of this amazing program that lets high school students acquire professional skills and certifications before they graduate. Sandra Harrington has the details.

We intend to revisit the subject of youth programs in Virginia in a future issue, so if you have a local program that is working for the young people in your community please send information to the editor (Rob Bullington, rbullington@vml.org). Also, be sure to enter your program in the "Working with Youth" category of VML's 2019 Innovation Awards (more info available on page 26).

Danville Project Imagine

Program aims to help youths trade gang life for working life

ON A DAY IN DECEMBER, the graduates of the City of Danville's first work readiness class for teenage gang members walked one-by-one to the front of the community room in the Ruby B. Archie Public Library to receive their completion certificates. For Robert David, the city's gang violence prevention and youth services coordinator, it was an emotional moment. He fought back tears as he addressed the graduates:



Robert David

"I know there is a lot said about being a man, and I know that is really heavy on the streets, and I understand that," said David. "But what you guys have done in these last three months is stand up like men." He continued, "I respect you. To see you not go back to jail, to see you do something positive, it touches me because

I believe in the best in you."

This auspicious moment did not come easily.

Prior to David's arrival, Danville had adopted the comprehensive gang violence prevention model offered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the National Gang Center. Under this model, multiple agencies partner in activities and programs to engage youth and high-risk gang-involved populations. The agencies include community services, courts, government, law enforcement, non-profits, schools, social services, faith-based groups and grassroots organizations.

That model also led to the creation of David's position. David is a life and recovery coach, motivational speaker, a drug-free Mr. Universe bodybuilder, and four-time world champion powerlifter. Danville City Manager Ken Larking said, "Robert David not only has the necessary training and experience, but he has a passion for empowering youth and, as a result, improving communities."



With that passion, David went to work putting partnerships in place for Project Imagine. He found partners in the Virginia Workforce Center, which provided funds, and the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, which referred the youths for Project Imagine.

Danville Mayor Alonzo Jones also praised the partnerships that have made the gang intervention program a success. "When I became mayor, I asked that we add one strategic goal to our list," Jones says. "That goal is creating partnerships. Look at what we have done here by working together as partners."

Why Project Imagine? Why Danville?

Four years ago, the City of Danville adopted a new credo, "Danville: Reimagine That." The credo captures the spirit of the city's



Danville: Project Imagine

progress and sends a clear message within and outside the Danville community that the city strives to adapt to changes and challenges that come its way by taking a step back from established ways of doing things and asking, “Is there a better way? Let’s re-imagine this.”

But youths mired in gang activity often can’t imagine a different way to live their lives. Robert David knows this truth well, having worked with youths for most of his career. Prior to joining the City of Danville last June, he served as a juvenile court counselor with the N.C. Department of Public Safety, a community gang liaison in Rockingham, N.C., and a probation officer in California.

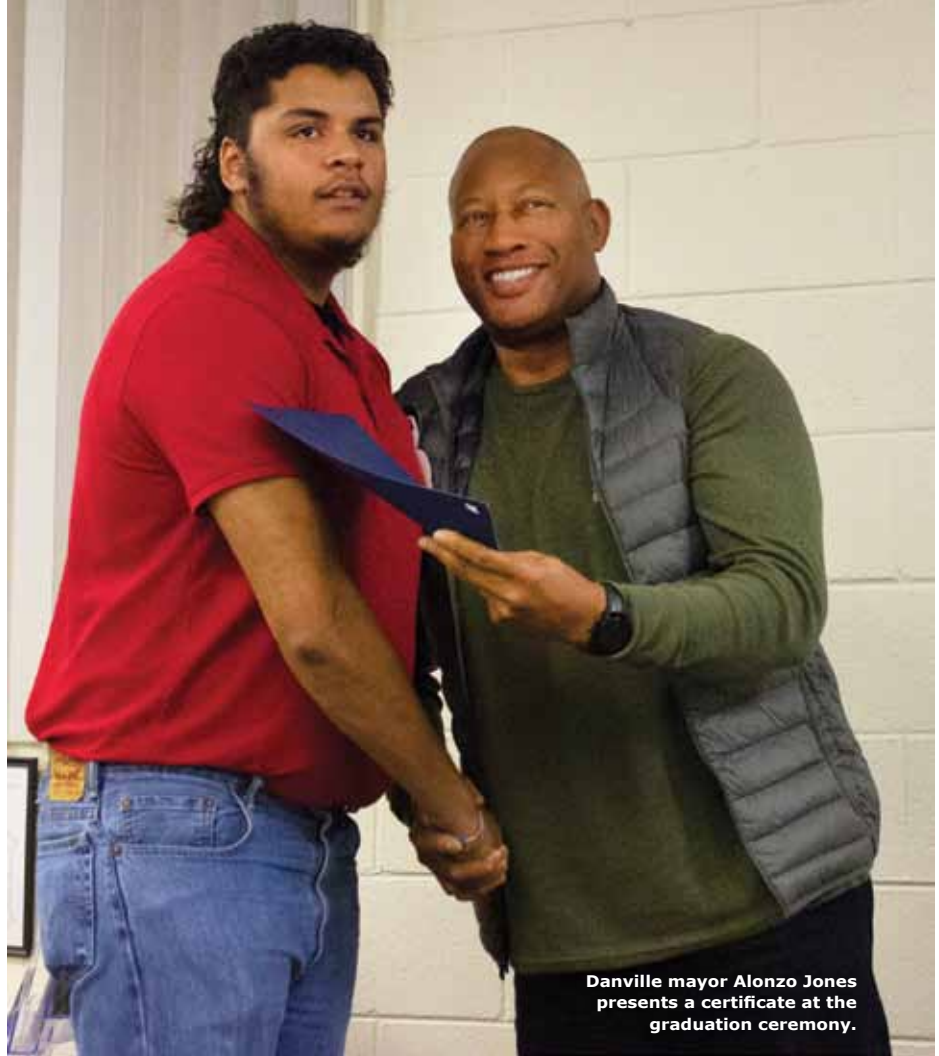
“We have to give these youths a vision first,” David explains. “While living in California and working as a probation officer, I often volunteered at the local alternative school where I saw how bright, personable young men were used as pawns to advance the gang agenda. Since that time, I have made it a personal mission to help communities provide services for youths who desire to change their lives.”

David continues, “My philosophy is that everyone has a purpose. Gang members have purpose, but unfortunately it is being directed in the wrong avenue and misused. The key is to find the right avenue to direct that purpose. Through Project Imagine, these youths will be able to imagine that they can have a better life, to imagine that they can be productive citizens, and to imagine that they can be connected to this community.”

How does Project Imagine work?

The nine-week training and employment program is designed to give youths with gang connections a future off the streets by providing them with paid work experience as well as mentoring while on the job.

Five teens — aged 15 to 18 and identified as being involved in gang activity to some degree — took part in the first-of-its-kind program. They graduated having worked in jobs provided by the City of



Danville mayor Alonzo Jones presents a certificate at the graduation ceremony.


Danville’s public works and parks and recreation departments.

The teens were paid \$10 an hour through the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program. Created by Congress in 2014, the program assists at-risk youth and those with significant barriers to employment move into jobs and careers as well as helping employers hire and retain skilled workers.

“What better way to empower youth than money, and in the process of getting that money they get work experience, they have mentors, and they are exposed to a life that they have never been exposed to because now they are working in the community,” David said.

“There is a level of pride and a level of satisfaction with that. You cannot put a dollar sign on what these youths are going to experience — to work for the City and be able to bring money back home to their mother. No gang is stronger than the ability to make your mother proud of you.”

“We want to celebrate the fact, not necessarily that they did everything perfectly, but while they were in the program there were no new criminal charges filed against these young men, no new gang-related activity noted, and no probation violations or recommitments. So that’s a success,” David said at the graduation ceremony.

A second group of at-risk teenagers is currently taking part in Project Imagine. For this session, the Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority is partnering with the City of Danville to provide jobs for the teens. 

About the author: *Arnold Hendrix is the Public Information Officer for the City of Danville.*



Robert David speaks as City Manager Ken Larking listens at the graduation ceremony.

Petersburg

Student Development Academy – Job Shadowing Program

Young people learn what it takes to work for a city

WITH THE GOAL of diversifying educational opportunities for Petersburg youth, especially during the summer when school is not in session, the Petersburg Student Development Academy – Job Shadowing Program welcomed its first class of students in the summer of 2018.

“I received my start in local government as a teenager, this prompted me to pursue a career path toward becoming a City Manager. I believe it’s important to ignite that spark in young people.”

– Petersburg City Manager, Aretha R. Ferrell-Benavides

The program is a product of the CAPUP Grant with Petersburg Office of Children’s Services. The CAPUP Grant provides employment opportunities for children within the City.

The Job Shadowing Program is open to Petersburg students between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. Students who advance past the application portion are required to complete an interview process prior to acceptance into the program. During its inaugural year, more than one hundred students applied, and twenty-five Petersburg High School students were chosen to participate.

Throughout the summer months of June – August, each student partnered with a city leader across various departments to learn first-

hand what goes into operating a city. Students were involved with all aspects of local government including attending planning meetings, assisting in major projects, and gaining real-time experience in the day-to-day operations of their community.

“As we continue to rebuild and fortify the foundation that is Petersburg, Virginia, we are concentrating on developing our youth,” said Petersburg Mayor, Samuel Parham. “The workforce landscape is continuously evolving, and Petersburg is dedicated to equipping our students with the meticulous training to stand out.”

Gearing up for success

The 2018 Job Shadowing Program students benefitted from a summer filled with advancement opportunities and fresh experiences. During the first week of the program, participants completed a string of professional and social development courses including training in resume development, office etiquette, the art of conversation, proper social cues, and appropriate use of mobile devices in the workplace. Students were also enrolled in the city’s Magic Card program for the summer, giving them access to reliable transportation via free rides on Petersburg Area Transit as well as access to wellness offerings through membership in the Petersburg YMCA.



Program participants returned to partner with City leaders during National Night Out in October 2018.

“With our students, it’s imperative that we provide a well-rounded experience for them hitting all bases of workforce preparation and also personal development.”

– Petersburg Deputy City Manager for Community Affairs, Darnetta Tyus

This initial welcome week culminated in a trip to Maryland where students visited the A Wider Circle organization for a holistic, hands-on approach to workforce development programming. While with A Wider Circle, students went

through a full day of instruction on proper workplace dress styles through lectures and collaboration with personal shoppers. Students walked away from A Wider Circle with new business professional and business casual clothing to use during their summer jobs with the City of Petersburg.

“This opportunity was great!” affirmed Treyvion Hall, a 2018 participant. “Not only did we learn about different styles, but we also learned our unique fit for clothes. Every morning when I walked into work, they said ‘You’re looking sharp!’”

On the job, around the links and in the park

After the precursory week of professional development, the students were introduced to the city’s leadership team during its monthly staff meeting. The city leaders were impressed by the students’ clever introductions and determined energy that demonstrated they were eager to begin work for the summer. Their assignments varied, but the students reported success in their endeavors. Some examples:

- Treyvion Hall, a dual-enrolled senior at both Petersburg High School and Richard Bland College, learned about the Job Shadowing opportunity through another program he previously participated in with the City. During the summer of 2018 he worked with the Petersburg Parks and Leisure Department where he enjoyed learning about the inner workings of local government. “I attended lots of planning sessions, worked the front desk at the recreation office, and helped with site management,” Treyvion said.
- Joshua Taylor, a Petersburg High School Junior, enjoyed working with the Petersburg Public Library during his time in the Job Shadowing program. Joshua worked at each of the library’s desks, attended strategy meetings, and assisted with library education programs. “My parents and I thought it was a great experience,” he reported. “I would definitely recommend this program to other students.”

Editor’s Note: *Treyvion and Joshua are still currently employed with Petersburg Parks and Leisure Department and Petersburg Public Library, respectively.*



Job Shadowing participant consults with personal shoppers at A Wider Circle.



Program participant with deputy city manager Darnetta Tyus, Petersburg commissioner of revenue Britttany Flowers, councilmember W. Howard Myers and city manager Aretha R. Ferrell-Benavides.

However, it wasn’t all strictly work. In the spirit of opening doors to different experiences, students spent a day at Petersburg’s Dogwood Trace Golf Course (ranked #10 in Golf Advisor’s Top 25 Virginia golf courses for 2018). Dogwood Trace staff taught the students the ins and outs of the world of golf.

Additionally, in partnership with the Virginia State University – Educational Talent Search - TRIO program, students spent one week on Virginia State University’s campus taking part in professional growth and self-awareness sessions with University students and administrators. This special week concluded with an all-expense paid, trip to Florida to tour colleges and to visit Disney World.

While at Disney, students were assigned to small groups led by Disney World staff who provided an exclusive overview of the park’s employment process and business operations. Students were also engaged in backstage operations and learned how STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) principles are incorporated throughout the park. Students were impressed to learn how the various operations of the park – a veritable “city within a city” – work together to bring smiles to visitors each day.


2019 Program

“We’ve seen great success in the one year we’ve offered the Job Shadowing Program. We’re looking forward to this year’s applicants.” — Jacqueline Zemmitt, Petersburg Office of Children’s Services Program Manager

Tami Yerby, Director of the Job Shadowing Program, looks forward to welcoming back the 2018 participants in 2019 as job applicants and introducing new students to the program.

“The goal of the Student Development Academy - Job Shadowing Program is to create new avenues for professional advancement specifically tailored for our Petersburg students,” says Yerby. “The ultimate goal is to kindle an interest in our youth toward local government careers.”

Applications for teen summer employment in Petersburg and specifically for the 2019 Student Development Academy are available now. Applications can be picked up at Petersburg High School, Petersburg Social Services, and Petersburg Parks and Leisure Office.

To learn more about the Student Development Academy – Job Shadowing Program, call 804-324-4014. 

About the author: *Folakemi O. Osoba is the City of Petersburg Public Information Officer.*

Harrisonburg Camp L.I.T.

Camp for girls gives them skills to succeed as first responders (and at life)

THIS SUMMER, THE HARRISONBURG Fire Department (HFD) and Rockingham County Fire Rescue (RCFR) will host their second annual girls' summer camp, Camp L.I.T. (Leadership, Integrity and Trailblazer). The camp provides insight into life as a first responder so that more young women will consider the fire service as a viable career option.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, "there are 1.16 million firefighters in the United States, but only 7 percent are women." One of the camp's goals is to help change this statistic and encourage young women to become firefighters. "With Camp L.I.T. we wanted to create an exceptional experience to cultivate women in the fire service and strengthen their leadership roles," said Harrisonburg Fire Department's Fire Chief, Ian Bennett. "Often, we hear from females that they are intimidated because the fire service is a male-dominated field. We want to change that and turn the intimidation into determination."

Camp L.I.T. is a unique experience for both campers and instructors. The five-day camp includes activities such as physical training, fire simulations, and hands-on experience. Instructors cover a variety of topics throughout the week such as use of fire gear, fire prevention, CPR certification, search and rescue, mental health awareness, fire behavior, and building construction. And because the fire service is collaborative, campers engage in several team-building activities.

However, Camp L.I.T. is so much more than a fire/rescue camp; it is an opportunity for young women to work on personal development and empowerment to help them succeed in all aspects of their lives.

The core values from which the camp takes its name – Leadership, Integrity and Trailblazer – are incorporated into three awards (one for each value)



Camp
L.I.T.

given to three of the campers. Towards the end of the week, the girls vote on who demonstrated each of these qualities best during their time together. During last year's inaugural camp, the instructors were impressed by the number of names put forward for each award. At an age where campers might have typically been asked to pick the most "outgoing" or "popular," the girls at Camp L.I.T. took the assignment to heart and truly reflected on the awards.

As a testament to the bonds formed at Camp L.I.T., most of the campers really wanted to have an overnight event at the station. Although this could not be incorporated into the original camp week, it was decided to host Camp L.I.T. Rekindle in the summer of 2019. This will be an overnight, weekend retreat for the girls that completed Camp L.I.T. in 2018 and will give them the opportunity to stay in touch and nurture their friendships. Moreover, the training at Camp L.I.T. Rekindle will provide the girls with advanced skills giving the instructors the opportunity to learn more about how they can help each trainee stay focused to achieve their goals.

Camp L.I.T. will take place July 15, 2019 through July 19, 2019. Camp L.I.T. is open to girls ages 13-16 and is completely free of charge to participants.



Camp L.I.T. participants and staff 2018.



One camper's story

At the camp I became so much more confident as a person and realized that I can do so much more than what I tell myself. I was able to make new friends and become happier with who I am. One counselor in particular really helped me to remain positive and she found only the good in all the girls throughout the entire week. Although the tasks we were given may have seemed hard or even impossible to some of the girls at the camp, she helped each one of us power through it.

Before Camp L.I.T. I had never attended a summer camp and quite frankly I didn't know what to expect, but after going to the camp and meeting the amazing counselors and being introduced to so many other driven girls it was a week I would not trade for the world.

Since the camp, I have been set on becoming a flight paramedic and have further pursued medical classes and other medical camps that could help me pursue my dreams of becoming a flight paramedic. Without Camp L.I.T. and the help of the women there I never would have considered it. Even if you're not interested in a Fire and Rescue career the camp is an amazing way to meet new people, boost self-confidence overall, and maybe even open a whole new area of learning.



One mother's story

I knew my daughter was a very strong and driven girl. She always put everything into anything that she loved. She just never saw it in herself. I heard about Camp L.I.T. on the radio and it immediately spoke to me. It sounded like it was everything that my daughter had been looking for. I thought it would challenge her mind and let her see for herself that she is capable of great things.

I can say that the first morning she was less than enthused to go. I told her to absorb and give it a chance and there would be something positive to come from this. On that first evening when I picked her up, she walked out to the car with a smile that could light up the world. She didn't stop talking the whole 45-minute drive home expressing how excited she was to go back the next day. My heart was happy.

As the week went on, she told us stories of overcoming fears, physical endurance tests that challenged her, bonding with counselors and making new friends. I saw her come out of a shell that she had been stuck in for so long. I couldn't wait to hear each day what new mental or physical obstacle she would overcome.

*On the last day of Camp L.I.T., my daughter left with her head high and her shoulders up. She has taken everything that she learned and applied it to everyday life. She even decided what career she would like to pursue after high school. She's made it her goal that everything she does in high school and during the summer, will be focused on her career. She is **DRIVEN, BRIGHT, DETERMINED, SMART** and **CONFIDENT**. The best part is **SHE** knows it now, and that is what is most important to me.*

One instructor's story

The success of Camp L.I.T. has been my most memorable accomplishment thus far as a member of the Harrisonburg Fire Department. To be one of the originators of such a wonderful camp is very humbling. The idea of an all-girls firefighter camp started as a seed in many of the female firefighters' minds in our area years ago. To see the seed blossom into Camp L.I.T. is truly incredible.

We had the opportunity to foster passion and knowledge of fire/rescue in twenty young women's minds. We watched the girls transform during the week – from the first day they arrived as timid, quiet campers to empowered young leaders at the end of the week. Often, we forget as instructors how far we've come and don't take time to reflect on all our challenges and accomplishments, but Camp L.I.T. allowed us to share our personal stories with the girls. Our journeys helped us grow personally and professionally and allowed us to serve as role models for the campers.

The level of talent and experience from all the instructors was supreme and helped develop the campers into potential volunteer and career personnel. In some ways, I think the instructors gained more from the experience than the campers. At the end of the week we all walked away better people, leaders and sisters of the fire service. Camp L.I.T. was a blessing and we look forward to the many years to come.

About the author: Lieutenant Erin Stehle is a member of the Harrisonburg Fire Department and serves as the Public Information Officer.



Youth Summit

A city listens to its young people to find out what they need to succeed

ON A SATURDAY IN MARCH 2019, a group of community stakeholders committed to serving the youth of the Roanoke Valley, gathered to hold an event centered on job readiness for middle and high school students. It was the eighth such event hosted by the City of Roanoke and Youth Services Citizen Board in a five-year period.

Throughout the course of the day, organizers heard from O’Chaniyah Coles, a Roanoke City Public Schools student, who

spoke about attending all eight events. Speaking to a local television news reporter, Ms. Coles explained that the instructors “spoke to us about mindfulness, how to be successful, and ways to get a job.”

For those who had worked so hard to get the program started back in 2013, Ms. Coles’ words rang true and lifted their spirits. Indeed, it was a need for young people in the Roanoke Valley to learn those things – mindfulness, success and employment strategies – that had driven their effort to revitalize the Roanoke Youth Services Initiative and restructure the Youth Services Citizen Board. Those efforts began in earnest in 2013 when Roanoke City Councilmember Anita James Price began reaching out to young people to determine what they needed to succeed. “I did not know what the Youth Services Initiative would develop into, but I knew a need existed among our youth and, as a retired educator, I felt compelled to meet that need. I went into these efforts listening to our youth, and they readily spoke up about what they wanted,” explains Price.

The first Youth Summit

Building on Price’s findings, a group of stakeholders came together, rolled up their sleeves, and got to work by meeting with young people and the agencies that serve them to develop a vision and determine a path forward. On August 2, 2014, the group of stakeholders, led by Price, held the first annual Roanoke Youth Summit at William Fleming High School, one of Roanoke’s two public high schools. “No one knew what to expect,” admits Price, “but the event far exceeded our expectations.”

Approximately 150 students and 25 parents attended the first annual Youth Summit, which included free breakfast and lunch, social activities (including a DJ), and raffle prizes donated by local businesses committed to the effort and workshops on issues facing youth. Each student had the opportunity to attend two of the following workshops:

- **Our Media Driven World:** How media shapes trends in society, our opinions, and our decisions.
- **Positive Choices in Peer and Dating Relationships:** Tools to help young people have healthy relationships.
- **Cultural Diversity and Bullying Prevention:** Tools to shine a light on bullying and give students an understanding



Councilmember Anita James Price joins in.

Roanoke: Youth Summit

of various cultures and the negative impact of bullying. Victims no longer need to suffer in silence because many have the courage to come forward and tell their stories.

- **Be Proud of Your Selfie:** Don't let society and popular culture define physical appearances. Be proud of your selfie and be happy with your appearance, even if it is not in accordance with society and popular culture. (This workshop was popular among female high school students.)
- **You Don't Know Me, but I Know You:** We live in a digital world. Learn to limit what you put on social media, so you don't reveal more than you want the public to know.
- **Substance Abuse Prevention:** Illegal and controlled substances are dangerous, learn about the dangers and get tools to better handle stress.



Feedback from students leads the way forward

Surveys taken during the Youth Summits show a strong trend toward topics that help young people prepare for the future with comments such as:

“Let youth lead the day.”

“I would like to see career choice discussion groups.”

“Instructions on how to obtain information on planning for high school and college.”

“More opportunities that will help with jobs and future schooling.”

“Money, jobs for kids, how to build a better future.”


Other survey responses have suggested programs related to social issues such as building houses for the homeless, opening additional food banks, and eliminating violence.

This feedback was the catalyst for the Summer Youth Work Program. A partnership with the City of Roanoke, Goodwill Industries of the Valley, and the Workforce Development Board, the program debuted in 2017 and connected high school students in the City with summer jobs working for local employers. In just two years, the program has evolved into jobs for youth ages 16 and up, and job readiness for youth ages 14 and 15, with efforts to eventually place students in internships and apprenticeships.

The Roanoke Youth Services Initiative has expanded even further to address the needs expressed by students. In a previous survey under the category “Ask the Mayor,” the following comment attracted attention: “Get young people more involved with our city.” As a result, the



Youth Services Citizen Board was restructured to include four youth board members (two from each high school) who, as part of their role, are given the opportunity to attend the National League of Cities Congressional City Conference.

The common thread uniting all the efforts of the Youth Summit Initiative is the recognition that young people want to build a successful life and can often identify what they need to succeed. It's up to community leaders and stakeholders to create opportunities to hear them and then provide the resources and tools they need to build a foundation for success. 

About the author: Aisha Johnson is the Assistant to the City Manager for the City of Roanoke.

National program gives students certification opportunities

THE VIRGINIA BUILDING AND CODE OFFICIALS Association (VBCOA) held their Mid-Year meeting at the Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center March 31-April 1. The event drew over 150 attendees, including many first timers and attendees from the Southwestern part of the state.

During the VBCOA Business meeting, students from Washington and Montgomery counties were presented with their certificates for

The HSTTP program provides students with training that helps them to read and comprehend the official code books. Students who pass an exam at the end of the training receive a certificate.

the High School Technical Training Program (HSTTP). The program began in Bel Air Maryland at the Harford Technical High School in 2009 and quickly spread to five schools (4 in Maryland and 1 in Pennsylvania) in the first year alone. In the summer of 2014, VBCOA partnered with the Virginia Plumbing & Mechanical Inspectors Association (VPMIA), Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) and International Code Council (ICC) to bring the program to Virginia schools.

representatives from all 8 VBCOA Regions in Virginia. Spotsylvania High School was the first Virginia School to introduce the HSTTP.

James Moss, a Grayson County Certified Building Official and a pioneer for HSTTP in Virginia, began to teach codes to students at Grayson County High School which was set to remove their building trades program from the curriculum at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. "Building trades are my passion and one of the largest employers in Grayson," Moss said. "I could not let this become a reality." Moss approached Dr. Larry Massie, interim Grayson County High School superintendent, about the need for technical trade-related programs due to their role in workforce development and their impact on economic development. Moss set to work formulating a plan that included Grayson County, the City of Galax and Carroll County high schools, along with Crossroads Institute and community college representatives from Southwest Virginia and Wytheville. Moss also mentored student Kellam Allen to prepare for the IRC Residential Building Inspector exam. Kellam passed the ICC- B1 exam and was the first Virginia student to receive this certification.

When Kyle Kratzer became the VBCOA liaison for the HSTTP in 2018, the program was available in 24 Virginia schools.

As evidence of the program's success, Jim Ellwood, International Code Council (ICC) Career Development Coordinator points to Powhatan High School where Michael Payne, the electrical and carpentry teacher, recently started an HSTTP program. In its first year, the Powhatan HSTTP programs saw 47 electrical students pass the electrical exam, 5 of the electrical students pass the building exam, 14 Carpentry students pass the building exam and 66 certificates of Completion earned. To date Virginia students have been awarded 325 Certificates of Completion.

VBCOA Mid-Year meeting highlights

VBCOA Mid-Year meeting highlights

Ron Schuett accepted Region of the Year Award on behalf of Region III. In presenting the award, VBCOA Public Information Officer Committee Chair Tom Coghill indicated that Region III stood out for many reasons including:

- An 18 percent increase in membership in 2018.
- Numerous and varied training offerings at their monthly regional meetings and code study classes open to code enforcement personnel, local design professionals and contractors.
- Quarterly meetings with the Shenandoah Builders Association that included education on the use of cdpAccess.
- Three schools participating in the HSTTP.



HSTTP and Virginia

The story of HSTTP coming to Virginia began in the Fall of 2014 when VBCOA representatives were invited to present to the Virginia Association for Career and Technical Education (VACTEA) conference and members of the VBCOA Board of Directors were asked to sit on a committee to review the Masonry I, II, and III curriculum. VBCOA developed a HSTTP committee in 2015 which appointed

VBCOA: High School Technical Training Program (HSTTP)

- Participation by Bryan Keagy (Combination Inspector for City of Harrisonburg) as a judge for the Skills USA framing competition at Massanutten Technical Center.

Jason Laws accepted the Merit Region of the Year Award on behalf of Region VI. Mr. Coghill indicated that Region VI stood out due to their:

- Active local, state and national committee participation.
- Legislative committee work in the Virginia General Assembly by Ron Clements and Julie Walton.
- Code update training provided by Randy Pearce.
- Multi-jurisdictional plan reviewer meetings lead by Jason Laws (Chesterfield County).

Additionally, Mr. Coghill indicated the PIO Committee was impressed with Region VI's invitation for local high school students to become "inspectors for a day." This was accomplished thru pairing specially selected students with experienced inspectors for ride-along opportunities. The student/inspector teams visited various work sites and gained hands on learning experiences. Their mentors introduced the students to code books and explained the certification process.

The Mid-Year meeting also included CEU eligible training in topics such as Wall Bracing Methods and Connections, Connector



(L) Region II Chair, John Broughton, (far right) VBCOA President Pete Mensinger pose with HSTTP students and staff.

Basics, Tall Wall/Mass Timber Construction, Quality Management for Fire Stopping, Special Inspections and the USBC, Wood Deck Construction. In addition, VBCOA conducted a New Residential Structures (NRS) re-certification class, which VBCOA is authorized by DPOR to provide for private contractors doing home inspections.



About the author: Sandra Harrington serves as the VBCOA Executive Director and is a member of the VML staff.

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“If I Were Mayor” Essay Contest Winners

THIS MONTH'S ISSUE of *Virginia Town & City* is focused on programs that serve young people in Virginia, so we feel it's fitting to feature the winners of VML's own program to benefit young people: The “If I Were Mayor” essay contest.

This is the fifth year of the contest and, as in prior years, hundreds of seventh graders from across the state submitted essays explaining what they would do if they were mayor or an elected leader of their locality.

And did those students deliver! As evidenced by their writing, these young people love their communities but are fully aware of the problems that need to be addressed. Fixing the roads, increasing access to quality health care, harnessing the power of volunteers, and improving education are just a few of the real-life, timely issues that the students discussed. The best among them went further and identified practical solutions to those problems and encouraged their audience to care about fixing them as much as they do.

The winners:

- **Statewide winner:** Maci Mitchell of Hamilton Holmes Middle School in King William
- **Region 1:** Virginia Elizabeth Stockner of E.B. Stanley Middle School in Abingdon
- **Region 2:** Maria Angle of Clifton Middle School in Covington
- **Region 3:** Kaitlyn Hull of Kate Collins Middle School in Waynesboro

- **Region 4:** Sadie Henshaw of Kenston Forest Middle School in Blackstone
- **Region 5:** Lily Konopka of Ronald Regan Middle School in Haymarket
- **Region 6:** Haylee Burnett of Auburn Middle School in Warrenton
- **Region 7:** Samera Blowe of James S. Russell Middle School in Lawrenceville
- **Region 8:** Luz Pinto Consuelo of the Academy for Discovery at Lakewood in Norfolk

Of the statewide winning entry from Maci Mitchell, VML President Anita James Price said: “Not only well written, but her points were well thought out as well! The items she identifies are certainly ones that her community clearly needs and have captured her attention. Education and infrastructure were topics that many of the writers identified, but Maci also recognizes the lack of health care in her town and makes it a priority. Congratulations to this future Mayor!”

In addition to a plaque, each regional winner received a check for \$150. The statewide winner received a plaque and \$250.



Statewide Winner

Maci Mitchell

Hamilton Holmes Middle School, King William, VA



HELLO MY NAME IS MACI MITCHELL. I live in Aylett, a small town in King William County. I think King William is a great place but it could be better with a leader like me. There are many things that I would change in King William if I were on the board of supervisors. My changes would include fixing the roads to make them safer, opening emergency care facilities that are open twenty-four hours a day every day, and to build an auditorium for the schools in our county and the community.

Out of all the changes I would make in King William, the most important to me is to open emergency care facilities in King William. We have no doctor offices that are open for twenty-four hours a day or open on the weekends. It takes thirty or more minutes to get to the nearest urgent care center. In a critical situation a person may need to be seen right away and can't wait thirty minutes. It could be a life or death situation and some people who do not have insurance will not call an ambulance. If we had an urgent care center in King William, people could get quicker treatment, which could save their life.

Another thing I would fix in King William are the roads to make them safer for cars and especially school buses. One of the biggest problems on the roads are all the potholes, so I would pave them. Also, I would make the roads wider to accommodate

both ways of traffic. Sometimes, it is not safe for buses to travel on the same road at the same time because the road is too narrow. Another problem we currently have is branches and trees that are not trimmed back and hit tractors, big trucks and buses. I would work with the county and VDOT workers to make sure our roads are always kept safe.

If I were on the board of supervisors I would want to build an auditorium for the schools and the community. If King William County had an auditorium, our schools could hold concerts and performances in there instead of performing in the gym or cafeterias in the schools. The community can also hold whatever they need like fundraising, family events and our annual Fine Arts Festival can be held in the auditorium. Plus an auditorium would be a good place for local people to show off their talent.

In conclusion, if I was on the board of supervisors I would fix the roads to make them safer, open emergency care facilities that are open twenty-four hours a day every day, and build an auditorium that the schools and community can use. Just these three changes can make a big difference in my community.



Region 1 Winner

Virginia Elizabeth Stockner
E.B. Stanley Middle School, Abingdon, VA



IF I WERE MAYOR I would focus on a blended business community. Where the arts, history, and industry work together to create a perfect place to live, work, and play. My hometown, Abingdon, VA is a small town with a population of 8,191. It is one of the oldest Virginia towns past the Blue Ridge Mountains, it has an array of opportunities for residents and tourists alike.

Abingdon was founded in 1778 and was a important gathering point for the battle of Kings Mountain. But, before the founding, it already had a rich history, in 1760 Daniel Boone named the area Wolf Hills, after his dogs were attacked by a pack of wolfs. In the twenty-first century the town sponsored a public art event which created 27 wolf sculptures, which were displayed around town. The wolfs later on were auctioned off with only a few remaining on display. As mayor I would try to work with our talented art community to create new wolfs to be displayed around town once more.

The Barter Theatre is Virginia's state theatre, is world renowned, and is found in Abingdon, VA. Robert Porterfield opened the theatre in 1933 during the great depression. It benefitted both the actors and the farmers by providing food for the actors and entertainment for the farmers. The Barter Theatre relies on both private and public

dollars to thrive. As mayor I would make sure I would connect the theatre community with potential business sponsors.

Many buildings in Abingdon are historic for different ways like the Fields Penne House or the Cave House. But unfortunately, some of these historic sites have fallen in disrepair. As mayor I would create a community fundraiser that would help raise awareness of local businesses and at the same time help save the historic sites of Abingdon.

As mayor I would expand utilities such as high speed internet access, natural gas, recycling trash pick up, and recruit high speed rail service to the area. Abingdon is a great retirement community, but it needs more kid and teen friendly entertainment centers. As mayor I would encourage the creation of a entertainment center with things for all ages such as an arcade, go cart racing, a putt putt course, etc. Also as mayor I would recruit more good paying jobs to diversify the community.

I believe as mayor Abingdon could work together to create perfect place to live, work, and play.



Region 2 Winner

Maria Angle
Clifton Middle School, Covington, VA



IF I WERE MAYOR, something I would do to make my city an even better place to live is deal with less litter and air pollution, education, and roadways and traffic. Mayors are here for us to help them and are willing to listen to there community. They help make things better and keep things that we want in mind to.

The first thing I would do is work with the litter and air pollution. We want the wild animals and everyone safe so that way there is no harm to someone or something. The litter and air pollution has gotten wild nowadays because no one cares anymore about what the living creatures out in the wild lives are like, they just care about their own life.

Another thing I would focus on is the education that the kids get these days. Parents are just letting their kids stay home, play video games, and not come to school and get their education. The kids have gotten lazier with Chromebooks and so have teachers it's like they just don't care anymore. There are no paper notes or writing in classes. You only really use the Chromebooks nowadays with all the technology there is. They need to do more hands on work white using Chromebook at the same time, I think. I have never really had a year that I feel like I'm not learning something. I feel like I'm learning how to use a Chromebook and how to get unblocked games. I think the teachers should also have to work more with

students one on one. That's why I would fix the education. Also we need to think of how we want our future generations. We want them to be able to help, not just to be all about technology and get the technology to do our jobs for us.

I would also really like to focus on the roadways and traffic. There have been bad accidents with cars and buses. I want everyone to be safe at all times while getting from point A to point B. We don't want people to get injured because there was someone drunk driving or being dumb. We want everyone to be safe so I think we should have people watching the roads at all times and not just worried about the way people look or dress. I think there should be a thing on buses to notify the police if their bus is being bad or if they get in an accident more than once. The buses and anything that has a kid in it is what we should really watch out for because those kids are our future generation. We should also be worried about the adults as well because they help make the future generation and help the kids in general.

As you can see I have things I would want to fix if I was mayor. I would be willing to take the time to focus on what people want. I want to focus on what my community wants. I would love to become a mayor one day, fix what I want fixed, and what the people would want fixed.



Region 3 Winner

Kaitlyn Hull

Kate Collins Middle School, Waynesboro, VA



WAYNESBORO WOULD BE A BETTER place if we had better schools. However to do that the schools would need more fundings, so how do we get more fundings for schools. If I were Mayor I would raise the amount of money that goes to the school board.

Waynesboro high school is in desperate need of a remodel. Just take this into consideration, if you have the oldest high school in the state would you want a new one? Most people would agree, but for the few who are still on the edge think about the fear you would have if you went to that high school, just knowing that it would collapse like a ceiling fan in the girls bathroom did. Just the thought of having to go there in two years makes me cringe.

A lot of people in Waynesboro are not the healthiest, so to prevent kids from turning out just as terrible I as Mayor would strongly suggest more encouragement for sports. Sports are a big part a healthy lifestyle especially for a kid. Right now in Waynesboro one of the worst reasons kids don't want to play a sport for their school is because of uniforms mostly for girls. Girls on sports

teams usually end up with the hand me down uniforms of the boys teams before them, causing the uniforms to be large, baggy, uncomfortable and sometimes smell. If I were Mayor would try my best to make sure that the new uniforms for girls teams are actually new and that the high school and the middle school put as much effort into the girls uniforms as they do for the boys.

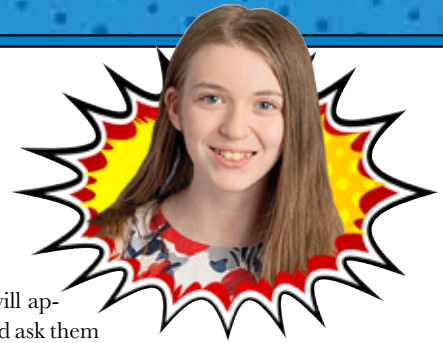
If I were Mayor I would also give the schools more money for furniture like desks, tables, and chairs. At Kate Collins countless chairs, tables and desks have broken but since the school has no money for repairs they are forced to use those chairs and tables regardless. With more money the schools could buy more furniture and keep the school safer. Also if it's that bad at the middle school I can't even imagine what it's like at "the oldest high school in Virginia." In conclusion Waynesboro would be a better place if we just had better schools.



Region 4 Winner

Sadie Henshaw

Kenston Forest Middle School, Blackstone, VA



AS MAYOR OF THE TOWN of Blackstone, I want to focus my efforts on the Main Street Business District. I envision a beautiful downtown with an emphasis to improve traffic safety and provide an attractive area where people want to live and shop. Below I have outlined my action plan and vision for Blackstone.

The first part of my action plan focuses on improving the flow of traffic downtown. I will begin with a request for city council to place restrictions on all commercial truck traffic along Main Street, mostly, between Tavern Street and Nottoway A venue. I have witnessed on a daily basis, pedestrians dodging large trucks. I believe heavy trucks are especially dangerous and discourage people from stopping to shop. My priority will be to detour large trucks to the rear of businesses along Brown Street and to add signage at Maple Street to encourage people to use parking in the rear of businesses and to walk downtown.

The second part of my plan seeks volunteers and sponsors to beautify Main Street. I want to hold a contest where artists submit ideas for decorating local crosswalks to encourage awareness of pedestrians. Artists may also be hired to implement their ideas. Local artists and craftsmen will be commissioned to design and install unique bike racks, build a variety of benches, and to decorate trashcans. In exchange for their help, we can promote their crafts at an annual craft show and community festival.

The third aspect of my plan is intended to provide fresh quality foods and greenery for the community. I want to support a local

gardening initiative. I will approach local farmers and ask them to sponsor horticulture classes. In addition, I will call on volunteers to supply materials necessary for raised gardens, including soil compost, and fertilizer. The fruits and vegetables produced in the community garden will supply local restaurants or provide food for the needy. Our community garden will not only add beauty to the downtown, but also bring residents closer together. My plant a tree and flowers initiatives are designed to grab the attention of potential shoppers. Business owners will be supplied with planters outside of their shops to plant trees and flowers.

I believe that the residents of Blackstone should be more informed about meetings, festivals, contests, and other events. A community flyer and bulletin board to notify the people will be placed in the common area. Since the majority of residents acquire their news online, I will encourage a website to be made with town events and other community activities.

As mayor, I will be an effective leader, and I will strive to make a significant and lasting impression on the town. I will seek to implement the ideas I have outlined. I believe that together with City Council Members and volunteers, we can have a beautiful downtown where truck traffic is kept to a minimum, families can enjoy time together, and local business owners can profit.



Region 5 Winner

Lily Konopka

Ronald Regan Middle School, Haymarket, VA



BEING A MAYOR IS HARD, hard work. You must juggle many tasks, such as keeping your city clean, balancing a budget, and dealing with people who all want something different. I love my town of Haymarket, but it's not perfect. There are a couple of things that might need a little changing ...

If I was appointed as mayor, I would start by improving the school system. As students get older, school is no longer fun. It turns into more work/ and no play. I would like to find a way to make classrooms more interesting, so that students will learn more and stay engaged. This is important because the older you get, the more your grades and work ethic in school will affect your future. So, by keeping students social and engaged, we can help provide for them a better future.

The second thing I would do if I were mayor for a day would be to do something involving the community, such as a community garden or farmers market. In doing this, more people in our community can be involved. This would also be a great way to introduce healthy, fresh foods back into people's lives. This is important because just being outside and around other people can help make a friendlier community and provide many people with a good way to spend their day.

My third order of action as mayor would be to help clean up

our community. My town is not a dirty town by any means, but it could be cleaner.

I would try to start a committee of people dedicated to keeping our streets cleaner, and maybe even find a way to reward those who do the most. This is important because keeping our community clean is a good way to give back to the environment and fight back against pollution.

The fourth and final thing I would do as mayor for a day is try to open more bike paths, parks, pools, lakes, and ponds. Providing a way for people to spend time outside is a great way for them to do so. Just walking for 30 minutes every day is known to decrease risks of many diseases and it helps relax the mind. It is also a great way to get the exercise that most people don't get from sitting inside all day. People can also spend more time with family and friends or develop new relationships with people by going to a common area, like a lake or pool. This is important because I feel like most people in my town, especially students, don't spend enough time outside as they should.

By making these changes, I hope to have made Haymarket a better, cleaner, smarter town. I hope I gave people more opportunities to make our town, environment, and community a better place. I also hope I am re-elected next year!



Region 6 Winner

Haylee Burnett

Auburn Middle School, Warrenton, VA



IF I WERE MAYOR of the town of Warrenton, I would get to work right away with several initiatives that I believe will benefit the town. My first initiative is to start a neighborhood enhancement voluntary program to help many people by sustaining their neighborhood. I believe starting this program will benefit our community by maintaining our residential homes and getting rid of unwanted yard and household waste. This program will help many people keep their properties in beautiful condition so our people can be proud of where they live.

My second initiative is to engage and benefit our business community. I would sit down with the business leaders of Warrenton to develop programs that would train prospects on the non-academic skills needed to be successful in their industries. I believe this is a great idea for people to know what to do so they have a higher chance of keeping their jobs.

My third initiative is to benefit Warrenton's public schools by creating an after school facility that is opened to young and older kids, which will include fun and energetic activities for kids to have fun and get a chance to meet new people. I believe that social interaction is important for minors, so creating this youth facility will open new opportunities for kids and teens. There will be snacks provided like popcorn, fruit punch, cookies, and much more for when we watch movies in the movie area. Fun and physical ac-

tivities will be provided like rope swinging into foam pits, Water balloon dodgeball, an inflatable maze, four square and much more.

My last initiative is to start a program to end bullying. I believe this will make our schools and our communities a safer and better place for all ages. This program will meet once a week and help inform kids on what to do in case of a person trying to bully you. I believe this is healthy for the community to understand the importance of treating others the way you want to be treated, and I believe this committee will help the Warrenton schools and surrounding communities change the culture in how we talk to each other. This program will help exert an influence upon our town that promotes tolerance towards all.

In conclusion, I believe all these ideas will help benefit our community. These initiatives will help make Warrenton a better place. Helping our community with Neighborhood enhancement will make our neighborhoods cleaner and more enjoyable. Engaging our business community with trained prospects is a great way to help people be successful. Taking action in building an after school facility for minors to interact safely with each other as well as making our schools a better place with an anti-bullying program will help kids feel comfortable with going to school.



Region 7 Winner

Samera Blowe

James S. Russell Middle School, Lawrenceville, VA



IN THE TOWN OF ALBERTA our mayor is Ashley Diane I think she is doing a great job so far, but we still need improvements. If I were mayor of Alberta, I would build more stores, clean up Alberta, have more activities for us to do, and build more houses. As mayor my primary responsibility is to preside at council meetings. Also the mayor has to act as head of the city for ceremonial purpose. A mayor's job is to be head of the city, they officially speak for both the government and community whole. In all statutory cities, the mayor is the presiding officer and regular member of the city council.

The first thing I would do is build fast food places and a Food Lion or Wal-Mart because Alberta only has two stores and that is Family Dollar and Exxon. I think we need more than two stores because we have to drive all the way to South Hill or Lawrenceville just to get groceries. So, when Food Lion or Wal-Mart open people could work there so people could have more jobs and they can get money to help with their families and pay the bills they need.

The second thing I would do is clean up Alberta; it does need cleaning because we have big tree branches everywhere in Alberta.

We also have trash that people just throw outside. I don't think its right for people to treat the world like that. So, I would start a program where kids and adults can join together and clean up Alberta. It will be called "Go Green Alberta." I know people don't like cleaning, so everyone don't have to join in the people who would be cleaning are volunteers.

The third thing I would do as mayor is plan activates for people to do. Like a parade or a fair where kids can have fun and enjoy every other five months. Also I would build houses for the people who need homes. I would become a landlord and let them rent out the houses for \$110. I don't think it should cost a lot of money because people should only have to worry about their family.

In conclusion, if I were mayor I would do a lot of things to improve Alberta. I would clean Alberta, build more stores and houses, and plan more activities. Alberta would have more people if I do this stuff. Alberta could be a fun and great place today. We would have closer stores for people, nice houses for people to move in, and cleaner community. I got a question for you, would you do the same for your city.



Region 8 Winner

Luz Pinto Consuelo

Academy for Discovery at Lakewood, Norfolk, VA



BEING MAYOR OF A CITY is a big deal and a huge responsibility. As mayor, it's your duty to keep the city safe and successful. The mayor of Norfolk, Kenny Alexander, is doing a great job in doing that right now. If I were to be mayor of Norfolk I would also do things that would make the city of Norfolk a better place.

If I were mayor of Norfolk, I would try to resolve three of the biggest problems in Norfolk, flooding, crime, and pollution. Flooding is major in Norfolk, and to solve that problem, I would want to redesign the storm drain system or add more storm drains to limit flooding. As a citizen of Norfolk, I know that flooding can get really bad in certain areas and can prevent people from going to work, schools, and other activities. Also, according to the article by pilotonline.com, by 2030, Hampton Roads Homes could be underwater!

The next problem I would want to resolve is pollution. Pollution is a big problem in Norfolk and all around the world. In an article by ABC News Now, scientists took air samples of different zip codes all around VA and found out that the top 5 zip codes with the most "toxic" or polluted air are in Hampton roads, right near Norfolk. What I would want to do to prevent pollution is make more laws and enforce more laws about pollution. There are already laws that stop people from polluting, but the government

is not enforcing them on people. I would also consider banning or limiting the use of plastic bags because that is one of the biggest causes of pollution. Also, since Norfolk is near the coast, we don't want plastic bags affecting wildlife.

Another major problem in Norfolk is crime/violence. Compared to other cities in VA, Norfolk has a pretty high crime rate. Yes, the crime rate has gone down since 2017, but ifs still not where we want it to be. In the news, there's always some sort of crime or violence happening in Norfolk. According to the Norfolk Crime Mapping website, there have been 259 crimes reported in Norfolk currently. What I would want to do to change that is to have police patrol the neighborhoods with the most crimes reported. I would also want to hire more higher end and trained police who are more responsible. Mayor Alexander mentioned that one reason why the crime rate is so high now is because when 9/11 happened, police started being way more cautious and patrolling the cities military style. Now, they have stopped doing that so it's easier for people to commit crimes.

In conclusion, I would want to make a lot of positive changes to benefit the people of Norfolk because as Kenny Alexander has said, the mayor, "works for the people!"

CALL FOR ENTRIES

2019 VML Innovation Awards

THE 2019 VML INNOVATION AWARDS celebrate all that you do to make your city, town or county a great place to live.

The Innovation Awards recognize outstanding achievements in local governments across Virginia. The program – which began under the name “Achievement Awards” 43 years ago – is recognized as Virginia’s highest honor in local government creativity.

Don’t miss this opportunity to spotlight programs that have made a big difference to your residents and to celebrate innovative solutions that address emerging needs. The awards will be presented at VML’s Annual Conference in Roanoke in October.



City of Falls Church - 2018 Environmental Quality and President’s Award winner.

Criteria

Projects and programs are judged on how well they demonstrate the following:

Innovative problem solving

Improved quality of life

Excellence in management

Making the most of local resources

Increased citizen participation

Long-term value to the community

Adaptability to other communities

Award-winning projects typically demonstrate innovative ways of delivering services, address a community need, or significantly improve an existing service.

Categories

AWARD CATEGORIES are based on broad topics with local governments of all sizes competing within these categories. The panel of judges have years of experience in local governments of varying sizes and will judge the scope and effect of the project in relationship to the community’s size, thereby putting all localities on a level playing field.

Many projects relate to more than one category. When deciding what category best fits your project, consider what the primary goal of the project is and what aspect of it demonstrates the greatest innovation.

Localities may submit only one entry in each of the following categories:

Community Health

Includes building healthy community environments through active lifestyle programs, nutrition education and improving access to healthier food choices.

Economic Development

Includes business development and retention; international competitiveness; infrastructure development and investment; planning, land use and zoning; blight; enterprise zones; housing; transportation; workforce development; and historic preservation.

Environmental Quality

Includes natural resources and the authority of local governments to manage the environment, including water resources and quality, solid and hazardous waste management, air quality and the Chesapeake Bay.

Public Safety

Includes police, fire, rescue services, emergency planning and coordinated response, building code enforcement, jails, health and mental health related to public safety.

Working with Youth

Includes civics education, pre-k-12 education, summer programs, parks and recreation, and literacy programs

Communications

Includes promotional campaigns, branding campaigns, crisis plans, events, customer service programs; media can include online, video, print, social and other formats.

[Newest Category] Risk Management

Includes the process of identifying, assessing and controlling threats to a locality’s capital and earnings, investments and diversification, IT security threats and data-related risks, and the risk management strategies to alleviate them.

President's Award for Innovation

One winning project from the category winners will be selected for the top prize – the President's Award – and will receive this top honor in addition to the award in their category. The President's award can come from any of the categories.



Deadline

All entries must be received via e-mail by 5 p.m., Monday, Aug. 12, 2019.

Rules for entering

The competition is open to all VML local government members.

All entries must be submitted electronically via email. Localities must download the entry form at www.vml.org/education/innovation-awards and fill in all of the requested information directly on the form. The completed form must then be e-mailed to mtimbreza@vml.org.

Entries must cover new projects or programs completed between Jan. 1, 2018 and June 1, 2019, or – for existing projects – entries must cover major enhancements that occurred between Jan. 1, 2018 and June 1, 2019.

Each entry form must be fully completed and must be signed by the local government's chief administrative or elected official.

A local government can only submit one entry in each of the five categories. The President's Award for Innovation is not a separate category.

Supporting materials totaling no more than 10 pages, including photos, brochures, charts, or other information, can be included in a separate document. This document must also be e-mailed.

NEW THIS YEAR: A video is also required as part of your supporting materials, include the URL (or web address) of that video. Maximum length of video is five minutes.

Questions?

For more information about completing your entry or other details, contact VML's Manuel Timbreza at mtimbreza@vml.org or call 804-649-8471.

The judging

Entries are screened by VML staff and judged by a panel of judges chosen for their expertise in local and state government. The judges generally represent a variety of backgrounds, including small and large localities and state agencies.

The winners

Awards will be presented at the VML annual conference in Roanoke, Oct. 6-8. All winning entries will also be featured in *Virginia Town & City*.

Don't miss this premiere opportunity to spotlight innovative programs that make your town, city or county a great place for people to call home!

Get started now
by downloading
the entry form
at www.vml.org.



FOCUS ON OUR MEMBERS

Local officials are a fascinating bunch of people who have careers all over the board and a range of backgrounds and interests. Over the next several months VML will include a brief focus on various members so that we can all gain an appreciation of what a diverse group occupies the seats in council and board chambers. Do you know someone who could be featured? Email Rob Bullington at rbullington@vml.org.

By Mary Jo Fields

Kelly Burk, Mayor, Town of Leesburg

KELLY BURK HAS HAD a very interesting career as an elected official: She served on the town council in Leesburg from 2004 to 2007 and then on the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors from 2008 through 2011. She returned to town council in 2012 and during that term was elected mayor in November 2016. Clearly, she has seen life as a local elected official from a variety of perspectives.

But holding an elective office is just part of her story. Kelly, who retired in June 2014, was a special education teacher with Loudoun County Public Schools. And the lessons she learned from that career have served her well as a local official.



First, Kelly learned as a teacher that you can't have a thin skin; you just need to learn to not take personally comments that are made to you. Kelly's students sometimes would make comments that were hurtful (and beyond hurtful), but she figured out that the students were not addressing her as a person, but as a teacher and perhaps as the person who just happened to be closest at hand. They were taking their frustrations out on her. Kelly said, "It's not personal. I've seen the same thing in public office. Citizens are not talking to you, Kelly Burk; they are talking to the mayor." She's learned that it is not easy but that you have to learn how to not take situations personally, how to not react and how to restrain yourself from responding.

A second lesson: You can't take yourself too seriously. If you take yourself too seriously you will be miserable. There's no benefit to being self-righteous and indeed, it will hinder you from getting things done.

A third lesson is to understand your relationship with others and how to use that understanding. Sometimes an indirect approach is needed in order to get a point across; Kelly notes that it's better to not take yourself so seriously that you think that you have to be the one to deliver a message. Sometimes it's better if someone else does.

A fourth lesson is that you have to learn to take one step forward and then sometimes one back. Progress doesn't occur overnight and certainly not in one fell swoop.

A fifth lesson is that you have to learn to talk less and to listen more. People want the chance to be heard; learn how to listen and how to give people the opportunity to say what they need to say.

Kelly has a bachelor's degree from George Washington University and a master's degree from Virginia Tech. And, even more importantly, she has learned how to take lessons from one part of her life and transfer that knowledge to a completely different part!

Benming "Benny" Zhang, Council Member, City of Williamsburg

BENNY ZHANG WAS FIRST elected to the City Council in Williamsburg in May 2016. At the time he was in his senior year at the College of William & Mary; he has since graduated and is now in his second year at the College's Marshall-Wythe School of Law. While Benny was the youngest person to be elected to the Williamsburg council, he was not the first W&M student to serve. His local government career did not start with his election to council; he was appointed to the city's Public Housing Advisory Committee when he was a freshman!



Benny is a busy person. Not only is he on council and a full-time law student, he is a manager in his family's rental property business. He also served on VML's Legislative Committee in 2017 and 2018 and is the current vice president of the Virginia Transit Association. Benny has said in interviews that this crowded schedule has forced him to be as organized as possible.

In an interview as part of W & M's student engagement and leadership initiative, Benny outlined three lessons that he has learned while being on council.

First, power corrupts and being in a position of power can corrupt you. Learning that has motivated him to continue to fight back against that effect, to tread cautiously, and to consider how his actions affect people. As an example, he described what he said was a failure in his leadership. He has a dislike of parking tickets and after receiving one he complained about it vociferously to staff in city hall, even to the point of making disparaging remarks about personnel involved in the parking program. In the midst of the harangue, he realized that his behavior had spillover effects on city staff and that he had to remember that some city employees heard him and saw him as a leader who was talking down to people who worked for the city.

Second, being on council has taught him to think about what is most important to him in his life. Which may be that those most important things – keeping your family together, as an example – is more important than holding an elected office.

Third, Benny says that he feels that public office is a noble calling and he tries to always remember that whatever he does, it should be for the best of the community. For people facing continuous election cycles, this can be difficult as you need to think beyond personal accomplishments on council to the long-term goals for the community.

Learn more about Benny through this interview posted at <https://soundcloud.com/bmz30>.

About the author: *Mary Jo Fields is an adjunct VML staff member and a contributing editor to Virginia Town & City.*



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