

Remarks of Mayor Alan P. Krasnoff As Prepared for Delivery
2010 Chesapeake State of the City Address
to the Hampton Roads
Chamber of Commerce
Wednesday, March 31, 2010

I want to thank the chamber for this opportunity, introduce Phyllis - my wife and a woman who clearly has the patience of a saint to put up with my schedule and the number of calls I get - and express my appreciation to you for your interest and support of Chesapeake.

I want to welcome Mayor James Holley from Portsmouth and Mayor Will Sessoms from Virginia Beach back to Chesapeake.

I also want to recognize and thank Chesapeake's constitutional officers and members of City Council for their service, and express my appreciation to Congressman Randy Forbes for his kind remarks and his substantial contributions to our community and country.

You should know that as I was about to deliver my first state of the city address last year, things didn't look so good for Chesapeake.

It would have taken someone totally out of touch not to know that tough times were ahead, . . . that it would be a rare family business or city that would not feel the effects of what we now know to be the worst economic downturn of our lifetimes.

People were worried as savings accounts and retirement plans began to disappear and - little by little - our expectations for a bright future got lost in a tidal wave of change.

Here I was - nine months into my first term as Chesapeake's mayor - without a magic elixir that would instantly restore confidence in the economy, with no simple fix to make the woes of the day go away.

All I had was faith and the confidence that if we would believe in ourselves and our worth as a community, we would make it. . . that if we would work together - that if we could agree on a common agenda and pull in the same direction - we would survive what for many others in America has been a terrible ordeal.

I said earlier that it would be a rare city that would not feel the effects of these tough times. In fact, nobody's gotten a free pass.

Despite everyone's best efforts, the demand for nutritional assistance went from 5,666 cases in January 2008 to 8,356 cases in February 2010 which - as more and more people have lost their jobs for the very first time - is an increase of over 47 percent.

Yet despite that strain on our system, Chesapeake's Department of Social Services received an award from the USDA for a payment accuracy rate of 99.09 per cent.

It doesn't stop there.

Last year I told you that library usage was up and that given the times we were living through, I didn't think it would go down.

It didn't.

Last year Chesapeake's libraries had a record-breaking year.

There were 1,624,000 library visits, which is a nine percent increase over the previous year.

2,366,000 items were checked out, an 18 percent increase.

642,000 folks used a library computer for an hour, a 9.3 percent increase.

And over 34,000 new library cards were issued, which is a whopping 113 percent increase.

These numbers may surprise you but I'm biased - and here's my card - so they don't surprise me.

According to a study funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and released just six days ago, one-third of all Americans over the age of 14 - 77 million people - have used a public library to access the Internet during the past year.

There is no ambiguity in these numbers. Millions of people see libraries as an essential tool to connect them to information, knowledge, and opportunities, said Marsha Semmel, acting director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which also funded the study. Policy makers must fully recognize and support the role libraries are playing in workforce development, education, health and wellness, and the delivery of government services.

I want, by the way, to take you back to the library study which also found that teenagers were the biggest users. . . half of those surveyed who used a library computer were between 14 and 18. And many of those young people said they used the Internet as they did their homework.

Now apply those metrics to Chesapeake. What you get is 321,000 hours spent on library computers by kids, in a city that over 16,000 children who fit that age group.

So is it any wonder our kids do better than most?

I don't think so.

Over time - and it takes time and a lot of dedication - Chesapeake has developed a world-class, top drawer public school system, and if there is any possible way to prevent it, our schools must never fall victim to a budget-cutter's red pen.

I spend a lot of time in schools.

I talk with kids of all ages, and they talk with me.

They don't ask about the future and they shouldn't because a child's future should always be bright which - after they ask me if I'm really the mayor - is what I always leave concerned about.

Yet I know that when we've asked those who work in our schools to do more with less, they continue to amaze me when they do.

While other schools systems may have their ups and downs, our students consistently go for the gold on playing fields and in classrooms and win it.

And don't think that winning attitude doesn't affect businesses in Chesapeake.

I don't dare turn around to look - because technology and I have been known to have some crashes - but I hope you're looking at a full page ad Canon ran in the top major newspapers across the country last December.

The ad talks about Canon and how great they are - and they are - but it also features employees from Canon's ITS help center in Chesapeake.

Canon could have gone anywhere, and the odds are high that Doris Higginbotham and others from Canon wouldn't be here today.

Canon could have pulled up stakes and moved over 500 jobs and a substantial payroll to any city in the country and they would have been welcomed with open arms.

Fortunately for us Canon didn't, and while Chesapeake's ideal location certainly had a lot to do with it, I like to think that a well-educated quality work force played an important part in Canon's decision to keep answering millions of calls with a simple phrase: Canon ITS in Chesapeake, Virginia. How can I help?

In fact that's my line, because beside all the fun stuff - things like throwing out baseballs on opening day and hoping I don't make a fool of myself - I like to think that if I can help one person, if I can solve one problem, if I can convince one company to stay in Chesapeake or one company to join us - then I'm having a good day.

What pleases me most is that our city's Department of Economic Development has that same attitude.

I like to call them Chesapeake's show, tell and sell experts, because they are.

Call for information or hit a bump in the road and if it's within their power to do it, somehow economic development will find a way to make it happen.

That kind of attitude is impressive.

So are the results, many of which are recounted in Chesapeake's inaugural edition of an Inside Business report.

In 2009, Electric Motor and Contracting made a decision to grow in Chesapeake, and has an 8.5 million dollar expansion underway in Cavalier Industrial Park.

Usui International completed a 22 million dollar expansion in Chesapeake by relocating and consolidating their operations.

The US Coast Guard Community Services Command Administration decided to open a new Coast Guard Retail Exchange here and consolidate and expand their day-to-day operations in Chesapeake. In the process, they've relocated 60 civilian and military personnel from other Mid-Atlantic locations, will add 50 to 70 new jobs, and bring new shoppers to the Greenbrier area.

All told for 2009, Chesapeake can claim over 600 jobs that were created or saved, and point to 135 million dollars in new investment, which is an 18 percent increase over last year, and demonstrates that we are a city that makes things happen.

In addition to existing businesses who are expanding - 632 new business licenses were issued by the Commissioner of the Revenue's office to companies operating in commercial and retail locations in Chesapeake.

But it gets better.

For the first quarter of 2010 alone, Chesapeake's Department of Economic Development has inked deals worth more than 50 million dollars.

RRMM Design Build, which started out as a Chesapeake business, relocated from Norfolk and returned home with 85 employees.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation - and all of them are my friends - will relocate its regional headquarters to the Oakbooke Business and Technology Center, bringing a 131,000 square foot building on line and adding over 100 jobs.

The Independence Place building, the city's and region's first LEED gold certified building is attracting new tenants, including Tek Systems and the Woolpert Engineering Firm.

Each one brings new life and opportunities to Chesapeake, and confirms my belief that despite a less than stellar economy, Chesapeake is open for business.

And if you wonder how much better it can get, consider this.

With us today is Bob Sasser, president and CEO of a little company based in Chesapeake called Dollar Tree.

Last year, Dollar Tree broke into the ranks of the Fortune 500, joining regional neighbors Smithfield Foods and Norfolk Southern. The company stock was the best performing stock of 2008, returning nearly 61% to stockholders and logging \$4.6 billion in revenue. Are we happy to call Dollar Tree a good business neighbor? Oh, yeah.

Do we care that in 2009, seven companies in Chesapeake were listed as one of the top 25 places to work in a regional report by Inside Business? You betcha.

And what does it say about Chesapeake that a guy named David Alderman could turn his layoff from Ford in 1980 into an opportunity? It says that an entrepreneur's dream can come true in Chesapeake.

David started his little business in a home garage. Today, it employs over 40 people and needs over 100,000 square feet of space to keep up with the demand.

What's his business?

It's Dave's Cabinets, and because David is an innovator and industry leader, next year he will become president of the National Kitchen and Bath Association which has nearly 40,000 members just waiting to help.

Is David alone in Chesapeake?

Not hardly.

Dendrite was ranked number 49 on the 2009 edition of Software Top 100, the leading and independent online review of the world's largest software companies.

T-Solutions, which is owned and operated by Jim and Darlene Todd, was selected as the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, 2009 Chesapeake Small Business of the Year.

Together with C & K Financial Systems, T-Solutions was also listed on the 2009 Virginia Chamber of Commerce Fantastic 50 List for highest revenue generating companies across the Commonwealth.

Dr. Harry E. Jenkins of Harry Jenkins Family Dentistry was the recipient of the 2009 Virginia Black Expo Chesapeake Business Leadership Award.

These are people and businesses on the move and I cannot tell you how proud I am that they want to call Chesapeake home.

So stand up - stand up Jim and Darlene Todd, stand up Bob Sasser and David Alderman, John Maddux, Bill Attebury and Steve Newing, Captain Edward Eng and Don Cole - and accept our thanks for recognizing that Chesapeake is a great place to be and do business.

The question, of course, is how - in the face of tough times we - you and I - have been able to turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones and obstacles into opportunities.

The answer is simple.

In just one year Chesapeake has developed the reputation, as Norfolk Assistant City Manager Stanley A. Stein said last week, of a city thinking outside of the box.

As just one example, soon work will begin in earnest on a new South Norfolk Jordan Bridge, but only because Chesapeake was willing to break all the speed limit rules to go from a concept to a reality.

You know the story.

In one day - after a series of meetings that lasted just one afternoon - Chesapeake and its leadership found consensus, had the courage to say yes to a concept still in progress, and was able to convince residents and legislators alike that this was a good idea worth pursuing.

Naturally, there were more than a few naysayers, but a project that began in December 2008 jumped through all the metaphorical hoops and got its final approval from the Coast Guard in December 2009.

And if you think this is normal, think again. Most bridge applications sit on a desk for anywhere from two to 15 years. 15 years. And even then, whether the stamp says approved or kill can be problematic.

But not with Figg Bridge Developers, who are incapable of accepting no for an answer.

The demolition process has been approved by the Coast Guard and notice to proceed for this work will be tomorrow, allowing Seward Marine and McLean Contracting to start around April 14th.

Lane Construction will be the bridge construction contractor, and the plan is for a new modern high level bridge to open in the winter of next year.

With us today are Linda Figg and three members of her hardworking team: Tom Jenkins, John Kristensen, and Pete Burkheimer. Please welcome them.

Naturally, I can understand that some might say the South Norfolk Jordan Bridge was a fluke, but I'd say it was the start of a trend.

After a series of discussions about how difficult and frustrating it could get trying to do business in Chesapeake, a group of folks from in and out of city government met to talk

about solutions.

Out of those conversations came a great deal and last year I announced that we had cut review times, stopped charging fees to cover our mistakes, and were determined to do more.

In fact, we have.

Last year I implied that you could put everything I knew about computers in a zip file it might take up a kilobyte, but if the smart use of technology could keep Chesapeake open for business on a 24/7 basis, that would be my goal.

Thanks to the innovative pocket protector crowd from our information technology department, thanks to Chesapeake Treasurer Barbara Carraway and thanks to folks from our development and permits department, a year later - today - I know it can be done.

That it has been done.

Beginning today you will be able to apply for and receive a permit right from your computer, which apparently is no small feat because Chesapeake - Chesapeake - is the first city in Hampton Roads to offer this service.

The first permit available is for plumbing - and don't even go there because it's one of the most popular permits offered.

But this is more than just a permit.

In fact, it's a foundation built to support a variety of online services for businesses and residents, so expect the list of permits available to grow, making it even easier to do business in Chesapeake.

To get you started today, staff will be outside to sign you up and show you how it works.

This by the way is a team effort that shows what talented people with a common agenda can accomplish, and I'd like them all - Mike Fitchett, Greg Testa, Larry Boyter, Rodney Bouldin, Bobbie Dennis, Dominique Gonsel and City Treasurer Barbara Carraway - to stand and accept my thanks and yours for a job well done.

Of course there are some with us today who might cringe when I admit to just how bad I am when it comes to this stuff, but I want to quickly assure everyone from IBM that I'm the exception and the smart ones just stood up, which is why IBM designated Chesapeake one of their Smarter Cities and were so impressed when they were here in December that we were featured at their Pulse Conference in Las Vegas in February.

The partnership between us has been really terrific, and I want the folks in Armonk to know how much we appreciate them.

Sometimes, though, it doesn't take bells and whistles and high-tech stuff to impress folks and make a difference.

Sometimes all it takes is kindness and concern to impress a resident named Melanie Burch, and an email from her to impress me.

Melanie lives on Point Elizabeth Drive where during an unplanned construction project, there were road blockages, no water during the day, and noise from pumps.

I'm sure it can't be easy to live with that, yet Melanie Burch wrote to say how polite, respectful, helpful and accommodating our city's employees were.

"My wish," she wrote, "is that the men and women who are out here, literally in the trenches, be recognized for their integrity and work ethic."

"I am proud," added Melanie, "to live in a city where polite, respectful, helpful and concerned city workers are employed."

Finally she said, "I thank them and hope you recognize their hard work, positive attitudes in the face of adversity, and commitment to the City of Chesapeake."

Today, Melanie, it's my turn to let you know that kindness should never go unrecognized.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Annie Keith, Elmo Langston, Gene Culpepper, Steve Perkins, Mac Caudle, Bobby Spence, and Tim Smith. They represent but a handful of Chesapeake's hardworking men and women whose efforts often go unnoticed.

Please say, "Thank You," because they deserve it.

Still doubt that we have dedicated people working for you and how they make me look good?

You'd be seriously wrong because in fact, we have.

Deadlines have a habit of creeping up on all of us, and sometimes it takes help from people like Karen Harrell, a public works inspector for Chesapeake.

It can take the testing of a water system and the final acceptance of utilities up to three weeks to complete, yet a new tenant - a drugstore - wanted a turnover date just six days away. Worse, it was Thursday, which meant Karen Harrell would need to be on-site Friday to do the chlorination on the water line and come back Saturday and Sunday for the tests to be taken.

What you probably don't know - what I didn't know - is that because samples must be taken 24 and 48 hours after chlorination and analyzed on a timely basis by a testing lab, they don't typically begin on a Friday.

Yet because of Karen Harrell's dedication to her job and our city, samples were taken and tested.

Karen was there Friday. And Saturday. And Sunday. And because she was willing to go the extra mile, the turnover delay went from three weeks to one day.

I cannot say with precision that solely because of Karen a drugstore opened on time, but I can say with absolute assurance that her efforts made a difference.

What I can also say is that Karen is one of so many others who are relentless in their efforts to make it happen, and she and they deserve our thanks.

I also want to say a word about those who keep us safe.

Those who work in law enforcement have been through a tough year and human nature being what it is, it would make sense that people would be more cautious - that they might hesitate before going the extra mile.

Yet to their great credit they haven't, which is why I want to recognize Rich Scott, for 14 years a sheriff's deputy who just completed the Law Enforcement Academy and is currently assigned to the special investigation section of our police department.

On November 12, 2009 - as he was driving to the Police Academy through heavy winds, rain, and flooding due to a nor-easter - here's what Rich Scott did.

While on Bells Mill Road, Deputy Scott observed a car that had been traveling behind him go into a large water-filled ditch, with only the roof and trunk visible.

Deputy Scott immediately pulled over and rushed to the car, which the driver was vainly trying to start.

Water had already reached the top of the car seat and was rushing in the window and the doors on both sides were blocked.

Without hesitation, Deputy Scott reached inside the window and pulled the driver out, who then told Deputy Scott her daughter was in the back seat.

Deputy Scott immediately returned to the car and rescued the daughter, whereupon he drove both the mother and daughter to shelter at a nearby coffee shop.

Without regard for his own safety, Deputy Scott acted quickly to save the lives of two who very likely would have perished in a ditch on Bells Mill Road.

Because of his action in service to others, Rich Scott has received the Chesapeake Sheriff's Office Lifesaving Award.

Rich is but one of many who every day put themselves in harm's way to keep us safe, and now it is our turn to thank him and countless others for their courage and selflessness in the face of danger.

Ladies and gentlemen, meet Chesapeake Deputy Sheriff Rich Scott.

I also want to say a word about those who wear our country's uniform, who serve in times of peace and times of war, and are often called upon to sacrifice without complaint.

You may know that if one of Chesapeake's sons or daughters makes the ultimate sacrifice in service to America, I order that our city's flag be flown at half staff in their honor.

It is then my sad and difficult duty to present a flag to the family as a mark of deep respect.

I can tell you that of all the things I am called upon to do, it is the most somber and emotionally draining, but it also the most uplifting, for despite the terrible loss marked by the moment, there is also a quiet sense of pride.

Those are the tough times.

Then there are the rare opportunities like this one when we can say thank you to someone still with us and show just how much pride and respect we have for them.

On December 7, 21-year-old U.S. Army Private Archie R. Gurkin was serving as a quartermaster soldier of the First Provisional Truck Company.

Stationed at Hickum Field in Hawaii, Private Gurkin was driving Army Lieutenant Colonel John T. McKay when he noticed planes flying low.

What they expected to see were Army Air Force planes.

What they saw were Japanese planes that had just gone past Pearl Harbor, were circling around for a second pass, saw in a car and its passengers a perfect target and opportunity, and took it.

Archie thought the car had had a flat tire but soon enough - after Colonel McKay flagged down a taxi and Archie was taken to Tripler General Hospital - Private Gurkin learned the truth. . . that he had been shot by a 4 inch long 50 caliber bullet.

He may not have been the first to be wounded - and Archie will tell you he knows he wasn't - but Private Gurkin entered the military's history books as the first treated at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Given the nature of his wound, today it's likely that Private Gurkin could have honorably ended his military career and left service with his Purple Heart. But for Archie Gurkin, that was not to be.

It was not until after the Battle of Saipan in 1944 - when a Japanese soldier used a grenade to kill himself and try to take Archie with him - that Sergeant Archie Gurkin would be discharged with a disabling knee injury.

Eventually Archie Gurkin settled in Chesapeake in the late 1940s, began and raised a family, and worked at the Norfolk Naval Base until he retired.

Archie Gurkin is almost 90 years old.

He is also one of many - whether they are veterans or businessmen and women with an idea and a dream or volunteers or city employees who keep Chesapeake open for business - who don't seek recognition, but deserve it.

Ladies and gentlemen, Archie Gurkin gave to us and now - these many years later - it is our turn to say thank you to him.

Finally, as if you need for me to say it, I want you to know that the state of our city - the

state of Chesapeake's future - is sound.

I won't say there won't be disappointments as we balance our wants against our needs. There will be.

But this I will say: Were I to look at Chesapeake from the outside, I would see a city already beginning to achieve its manifest destiny, where opportunities abound and no one is denied a chance to succeed.

From the inside, I see a city with a compassion that has no limits and a boundless energy and commitment to do well.

I am not, by the way, a Don Quixote with a pipe dream vision of Chesapeake's future.

Were that so, I would be speaking to an empty room, but I am not.

I hope you are here because you have a clearheaded understanding that while it may take time and hard work, there is little we cannot overcome together.

And when opportunity strikes – like the one that will come when offshore drilling becomes a reality – I will be there to help you succeed.

So leave here knowing that if you believe in Chesapeake then I believe in you, and that with God's grace and blessing we will make it happen together.

Thank you.