

2013-2014

*Center for Rural Virginia*

*Annual  
Activity  
Report*



Our Mission

To work with policymakers and stakeholders to create innovative solutions and expand entrepreneurial opportunities to ensure economic prosperity for all regions of the Commonwealth.



Our History

Created by the General Assembly in 2004, the Center for Rural Virginia works to advance economic development, job creation, workforce development, education, infrastructure, healthcare and other vital initiatives for the prosperity of rural Virginia.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Center for Rural Virginia – A Review of Accomplishments

July 1, 2013 – July 1, 2014

A Letter from the Executive Director	.....	Page 3
Organizational Changes	.....	Page 4
Project Overview & Specific Accomplishments	.....	Page 5 - 9
Leadership	.....	Page 10
Contact Information	.....	Page 11

## **Annual Activities Report**

**July 1, 2013 – July 1, 2014**

### **A letter from the Executive Director**

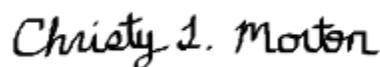
The 2013-2014 operating year of the Center for Rural Virginia was one of transition, new partnerships and innovative initiatives for rural Virginia. The Center launched several new programs and collaborative projects to address issues of importance for local and state constituencies, including public and private sector stakeholders.

This year the Center has focused on its role in serving as an advocator, facilitator and producer of projects, programs and collaborative initiatives to enhance rural prosperity. Each initiative the Center has embarked on works to improve and enhance successful rural communities, undertaking specific tasks and providing deliverables to assist decision makers at all levels of government and the private sector. The Center's selection of programs and projects is closely aligned with the Center's priorities set forth as economic drivers for successful rural communities. These include leadership and community capacity; education and workforce development; access to quality and specialty healthcare; infrastructure; entrepreneurship and small business; and regional assets and opportunities.

Rural Virginia encompasses most of the geographical area of the state and is the producer of vital products including agriculture and energy as well as the destination for many tourist activities. In addition to these traditional economic drivers, rural communities across the state are enhancing their economic development capacity through creating community based and regional ecosystems to attract and grow their own entrepreneurs, advanced manufacturing systems, technology companies, health science facilities, research and commercialization growth, among many other innovative industries, all while promoting the unmatched quality of life enjoyed in rural Virginia.

You will find enclosed a detailed summary of activities for the year. It has been a great honor to work and meet with many of you as I traveled the state visiting rural communities throughout Virginia. It is the dedication and hard work of our board members that make the impact of the Center for Rural Virginia possible. I look forward to another stellar year of innovation, collaboration and new initiatives to promote and enhance rural prosperity.

Best regards,



Christy T. Morton

## **Organizational Structure**

### **Executive Director**

The 2013-2014 operational year of the Center was one of transition and change. The Center's long-time Executive Director Glen Sink retired from the position and the Center's board appointed Christy Morton as the new Executive Director effective September 1, 2014. With new leadership naturally comes an opportunity to review previous operations and set forth a path forward with the direction and commitment of the board.

### **Collective Services Agreement**

The Center for Rural Virginia currently operates in a collaborative partnership with the Council for Rural Virginia through a collective services agreement as the Virginia Rural Center. The two organizations operate independently, but share an Executive Director and operate in conjunction to fulfill their joint mission of economic prosperity for rural communities throughout Virginia.

The Center for Rural Virginia is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization established by the Virginia General Assembly in 2004. The creation of the Center was a recommendation of the Rural Prosperity Commission, created by the General Assembly in 2000. The goal of the Commission was "Prosperity for all Virginians". The 18-member Commission was instructed by the General Assembly to "undertake a detailed analysis of rural Virginia economies and recommend flexible but targeted state policies which, combined with local efforts, will help foster sustainable economic growth in Virginia's rural areas."

The final report of the Rural Prosperity Commission was issued in December 2001 and featured specific policy recommendations, including the creation of the Center for Rural Virginia to address the obstacles and capitalize on the many opportunities of Rural Virginia. In 2004, founding board members Senator Frank Ruff and Delegate Steve Landes, sponsored the enabling legislation, creating the Center.

The 21-member board of the Center for Rural Virginia works in partnership with the 19-member board of the Council for Rural Virginia. The Council is associated with the National Rural Development Partnership, created out of the 2002 Farm Bill.

The Council is a member of Partners for Rural America, whose mission is to support the efforts of its member State Rural Development Councils (SRDC's), which are uniquely positioned:

- To expand economic and social opportunities for America's rural communities and their residents;
- To promote equal treatment of rural America by government agencies and the private sector;
- To provide a collective voice for rural America.

Together, the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia work with federal, state and local policymakers and regulators as well private sector stakeholders to improve economic opportunities and preserve the quality life throughout rural Virginia.

### Institutional Partners

In addition to the support of the Virginia General Assembly and the Governor's Office, the Virginia Rural Center enjoys partnerships with two other entities that make the daily operations of the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia efficient, effective and successful.

The first is the Department of Housing and Community Development. DHCD provides office space and back office assistance that enhances the productivity, accessibility to stakeholders in the Capital region and partnership opportunities that enrich the work the Center is able to conduct.

The second is the Edward Via School of Osteopathic Medicine in Blacksburg. The Virginia Rural Center's partnership with VCOM, through the Council for Rural Virginia, provides assets and operational efficiencies that greatly enhance the cost effective operation for both entities of the Virginia Rural Center.

### Project Overview & Status Updates

During the 2013-2014 operating year of the Virginia Rural Center, the collective organization and its individual entities have entered in several projects, partnerships and initiatives that will enhance the Center's work in rural communities throughout the Commonwealth.

- Regions Strategic Plans Assessment Project – Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission
  - The Center for Rural Virginia was awarded a TICR grant to conduct a strategic plans assessment project within the nine planning district commissions of the TICR footprint.
  - The purpose of the project is to provide an assessment of economic development strategies with the region to assist the TICR as they work to update their strategic plan and make funding decisions moving forward.
  - The project was a recommendation of JLARC in their 2011 report to provide detailed information to the TICR to better align priorities and investments between the communities and the Commission.
  - The Center is currently conducting focus group meetings within the nine PDCs with representatives from local government, private business, educational institutions and state and local policy makers.
  - An analysis of the strategic plans, economic development strategies and priority sectors is being conducted to provide feedback and will be provided to the TICR to assist with aligning strategies, investments and priorities moving forward.

- **Broadband Deployment and Telecommunications Workgroup**
  - The Virginia Rural Center has partnered with Karen Jackson, Secretary of Technology to enhance the deployment of broadband infrastructure throughout rural Virginia.
  - During the 2014 General Assembly Session, the Center worked with the Secretary, the telecommunications industry and other stakeholders on legislation to create a workgroup to address the issue. Notwithstanding the need for formal legislation, the General Assembly encouraged the stakeholders to move forward with this initiative.
  - To date, two telecommunications industry meetings have been conducted. Recommendations from the industry have been received and priority recommendations identified by the industry through a survey process.
  - The Center will continue to work with Secretary Jackson on this initiative as we meet with other stakeholders and explore administrative, legislative and regulatory opportunities to increase broadband expansion in rural Virginia.
  - This initiative will continue into the 2014-2015 operational year of the Virginia Rural Center.
  
- **Joint Commission on Health – Rural Health Working Group**
  - The Virginia Rural Center has been tasked with forming a Rural Health Working Group to bring together stakeholders to identify the challenges to quality rural healthcare and propose recommendations to address those challenges and expand upon opportunities.
  - The majority of the work for this initiative will take place during the 2014-2015 operational year of the Virginia Rural Center.
  - The Virginia Rural Center will present a final report with recommendations to the JCHC in October 2015.
  
- **Food Desert Study and Policy Recommendations**
  - The Virginia Rural Center worked with Virginia State University and Virginia Tech to host a meeting of the Virginia General Assembly’s Rural Caucus and the Virginia General Assembly Legislative Black Caucus for Dr. Jewell Hairston to present the findings and policy recommendations of the Food Desert Study.
  - This issue of food deserts and providing healthy food choices throughout Virginia is one of particular interest to both rural and urban communities.
  - The Virginia Rural Center will continue to work with VSU, VT, the Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia Agribusiness Council, state agencies and other stakeholders to develop partnerships and policy initiatives to address this issue.
  
- **Partners for Rural America (PRA) – Rural Futures Committee**
  - One of the two operating entities of the Virginia Rural Center, the Council for Rural Virginia, is a member of Partners for Rural Virginia.
  - PRA is the national organization of State Councils for Rural Development, authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill.

- The Executive Director of the Virginia Rural Center is serving on the Rural Futures Committee, a newly organized committee within PRA to set the direction and priorities for future action and initiatives.
- Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) – State Policy Panel
  - The Virginia Rural Center Executive Director is serving on the newly formed State Policy Panel of RUPRI. The State Policy Panel consists of 14 professionals from across the country that work in rural economic development, rural research and rural policy development.
  - Participation in the panel will provide opportunities for additional rural research needs in Virginia as well as access to a network for the sharing of best practices from across the country.
- New Website and Social Media Projects
  - The Virginia Rural Center launched a new website, facebook and twitter pages to increase the reach of the organization across rural Virginia.
  - The new website has sections on “issues”, “initiatives” and “resources” to provide additional information about the components needed for rural prosperity and where to access assistance in economic development, workforce, infrastructure, etc.
- The Virginia Rural Center organized and staffed weekly meetings of the Virginia General Assembly’s Rural Caucus
  - During the 2014 Virginia General Assembly Session, the Rural Caucus met weekly to discuss legislative issues of interest to rural Virginia as well as hear from Cabinet members, stakeholders and others with valuable information to share.
  - Speakers included:
    - First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe
    - The Honorable Todd Haymore, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry
    - The Honorable Bill Hazel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources
    - The Honorable Anne Holton, Secretary of Education
    - The Honorable Karen Jackson, Secretary of Technology
    - The Honorable Maurice Jones, Secretary of Commerce and Trade
    - The Honorable Aubrey Lane, Secretary of Transportation
    - The Honorable Molly Ward, Secretary of Natural Resources
  - A matrix of priority legislation was developed by the Caucus and tracked by the Center, providing updated information on each piece of legislation on a weekly basis.
- The Virginia Rural Center hosted the 2013 Annual Rural Summit
  - The 2013 Virginia Rural Center’s Rural Summit was held in September 2013 at The Crossings Resort in Glen Allen, Virginia.
  - The 2013 Summit brought together Administration officials, members of the Virginia General Assembly, local government representatives, private business leaders and other stakeholders committed to rural prosperity across Virginia.

- Speakers included:
  - Diane Duff, Executive Director of the Southern Governors Association who delivered the keynote address;
  - Attorney General Candidate Mark Obenshain who presented his campaign platform for rural Virginia;
  - Dr. Bill Hazel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources presented current healthcare challenges;
  - Lieutenant Governor Bill Bolling, who spearheaded Governor McDonnell's Rural Jobs Council initiative, discussed Virginia's future; and
  - Bill Shelton, Director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development presented on the agency's initiatives in rural Virginia to promote entrepreneurial and innovative economic development.
- Panels were as follows:
  - "How does rural impact statewide policy to build capacity"
    - Moderated by Senator Emmett Hanger, Chairman of the Center for Rural Virginia with presentations by Dr. Keith Miller, President of Virginia State University, John Thomas, President of the UVA Weldon Cooper Center and Mark Creery, President of Data Directions.
  - "Education and Workforce Priorities for Capacity Building"
    - Moderated by Bryan David of Region 2000 with presentations by Dale Moore, Founder of Virginia Technical Institute, Dr. Steve Staples, Executive Director of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, Dr. John Downey, President of Blue Ridge Community College and Brett Vassey, President & CEO of the Virginia Manufacturers Association.
  - "2013 Policies for Building Capacity Education and Workforce Positions"
    - Moderated by Robin Sullenberger, former CEO of the Shenandoah Valley Partnership with presentations by Senator Frank Ruff, Chairman of the Virginia General Assembly's Rural Caucus, Glen Sink, Center for Rural Virginia and Barry DuVal, President & CEO of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, who provided an update on the Chamber's Blueprint Initiative.
  - "Energy Policies and Initiatives to Promote Economic Development throughout Rural Virginia,"
    - Moderated by Bill Murray, Managing Director of Public Policy & Senior Advisor at Dominion Resources with presentations by Greg White, President & CEO of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, Ron Jefferson, Manager of External Affairs at Appalachian Power Company and Brent Archer, Director of Business Policy at Columbia Gas of Virginia.

- The Virginia Rural Center and the Virginia Association of Counties partnered to host the Annual Rural Caucus Dinner.
  - The Annual Rural Caucus Dinner was held in February 2014, at the Marriot Hotel in Downtown Richmond during the Virginia General Assembly Session.
  - Nearly 150 attendees from the Administration, General Assembly, local government and private business attended to hear keynote speaker, The Honorable Maurice Jones, Secretary of Commerce and Trade.
  - The Honorable Emmett Hanger and the Honorable Frank Ruff also participated in the program.
  - It was a successful event bringing together rural local government leaders with rural state government officials to provide the opportunity for information and idea sharing amongst attendees.

## **Leadership**

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Robin Sullenberger, Shenandoah Valley Partnership

Bill Tucker, Tucker Family Farms

Dee Walton, Virginia Telecommunications Industry Association

Brian T. Warner, Rolls Royce

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**The 2013-2014 Center for Rural Virginia Report**  
can be accessed at

[www.cfrv.org](http://www.cfrv.org)