

*Remarks by Mayor Alan P. Krasnoff
scheduled for delivery at the
Annual Chesapeake State of the City Address
Chesapeake Conference Center
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At the outset, I want to thank the chamber for the invitation, Father Jazmin for the invocation, and Congressman Randy Forbes for his introduction.

I also want to express my appreciation to Congressman Forbes for his work to ensure that 6,000 jobs and \$425 million in annual revenue stay in Hampton Roads, because that's what moving an aircraft carrier to Florida would have cost our community.

But beyond that, keeping the carrier here – as a Virginian-Pilot editorial put it – is a victory for good sense, and he and those who represent Hampton Roads in Washington deserve our thanks.

I also want to recognize and thank our constitutional officers and members of City Council for their service, thank our state delegates and senators for their representation, and recognize and express my appreciation to City Manager William Harrell for his contributions to Chesapeake.

With us today are Mayors Paul Fraim from Norfolk, Kenny Wright from Portsmouth and Will Sessoms from Virginia Beach, and I want to welcome them to Chesapeake.

I also want to introduce my wife Phyllis. I will never be able to thank her enough for her tolerance and understanding, because it cannot be an easy thing to stand aside as plans suddenly change or a meal for two grows cold.

Phyllis has my love and appreciation, and I hope you will join me to thank her for her service as our city's First Lady.

Before I begin, I also want to single out Elizabeth Hughes and say wow.

Just a week shy of her tenth birthday, Elizabeth has already demonstrated a grace under pressure that few of us will ever match.

To hear one so young sing the first 80 words of our National Anthem has been an absolute treat, and we thank you.

Finally, I want to speak directly to Meiling Houston.

No matter how many honors are rendered, no matter how many parks are named after him, I am certain there is little we can do that will help ease the loss of a Navy SEAL named Kevin Houston.

All this community can do is wrap its arms around you, keep you safe, and let you and your family know that when the days are not easy, we will always be there for you.

Now to the business at hand, which is this: Though no one has a crystal ball, it appears we have weathered the worst in terms of economic uncertainty and are emerging as a stronger and more energized Chesapeake. . . a Chesapeake that is sound.

Clearly, the past three years have been times of struggle for many, and there have been more than a few days when any rational person might have faltered.

Yet we did not.

Collectively, we pulled together.

We decided that the city that could is the city that would. And Chesapeake has.

And if you have any doubts, consider these numbers: 7 and 80, 43 and 21, 1.7 and 6.5, and 6 and 9.

In 2011, Chesapeake was ranked one of the country's top 10 cities by the Center for Digital Government, because when it comes to the use of technology, we are good.

For the second year in a row, Parenting Magazine listed Chesapeake on its top 100 list of the best places to live and raise a family.

With a rate of 1.7 percent, demographers at the Weldon Cooper Center say that last year, Chesapeake grew more than any other city in Hampton Roads.

And why? Because we're a family-friendly community that cares.

In its inaugural listing of America's best cities, Bloomberg Businessweek ranked Chesapeake number 21.

Why? Because we've earned it.

Pegged at 6.5 percent, Chesapeake's unemployment rate would have set the regional record for 2011, except that Virginia Beach beat us by five one-hundredths of a point. Why? Because this is where the jobs are.

24/7 Wall Street – an online investment news site – placed Chesapeake number 6 on its list of America's best-run cities.

Why? Because we are.

Men's Health Magazine ranked us number nine on its list of America's 100 most iPad friendly cities.

And why? Honestly, I'm not sure, but I see all kinds of people using iPads, so it's gotta be something good.

Finally, there's this number: \$2,913,930,953. and 43 cents.

That's our taxable sales number for 2011, which economists tell us is an indication that confidence in ourselves is on the rebound.

These kinds of numbers don't come easy. It's taken a lot of hard work by a lot of dedicated people, and it didn't happen overnight.

To illustrate that point, here is a story about what it means to persevere . . . and what happens when we do.

Last year, a woman desperately looking for a job began visiting the Cuffee Library in South Norfolk.

For six months, the woman – let's call her Abby – would come to the library to see Patricia Kendall, the library assistant who helped her every day.

Each day, Patricia would have a list of jobs ready for Abby, whereupon Abby would email, fax, and apply for jobs from 9 until 3 pm, when she would leave to pick her son up from school.

Then Abby would return with her young son, who would do his homework while his mother continued to look for a job.

Finally, after six months of rejections -short on hope and at the end of her financial rope -Abby was on the way to sell her blood when the call came: a job offer that would pay \$50,000 and lift up Abby and her small family.

Needless to say, Abby took the job and is thrilled to be part of a working America.

Could she have done it alone? Maybe.

But it didn't hurt that Abby had a Chesapeake library family committed to service and success by her side, and a dedicated library assistant named Patricia Kendall working to help make a dream come true.

Needless to say, I'm partial to libraries because of what they've done for me and countless others, but you need to know the numbers.

In the last fiscal year, over 2.6 million items were checked out, reference questions went up 17 percent, patrons spent almost 700,000 one-hour sessions on a computer, and online catalog searches jumped by a phenomenal 359 percent.

Will this remain the norm? Candidly, it's hard to know.

What I'm sure Abby would tell you is that in growing numbers, patrons are turning to the libraries in times of greatest need, and that they have become safe havens and sources of inspiration.

For me – for Chesapeake – our libraries are precious resources that deserve our praise and support, and they will have it, because the state of our libraries reflects the state of our city.

Of course, not all needs and not all safety nets are obvious.

When tragedy struck in a neighboring city, our health department's division of occupational health services began collaborating more closely with the Chesapeake's police academy to improve safety.

Instructors and police recruits were taught the signs and symptoms of concussions and the complications that could result from repeated trauma, and new standards were adopted to ensure that Chesapeake Fire Department medics are on-site during all the defensive tactics classes.

In addition to everything else it does – and because the estimated economic burden associated with a premature birth is \$51,600 per year Chesapeake's health department also focuses on prenatal care for expectant moms.

And does it pay off? Absolutely.

Last year, Chesapeake's rate of premature deliveries dropped from 10.6 to 9.8 percent. That drop equates to 21 more infants born at full term, which will mean society will save over \$1 million per year during the first ten years of the lives of those children.

The benefit of creating healthier environments for families and children can also show up in another way, and that's how well our kids do in school.

And how well do they do? Really well.

In Chesapeake, each and every one of our schools – all 45 elementary, middle and high schools -is fully accredited, and we have the highest on-time graduation rate and the lowest dropout rate of our region's school divisions.

Norfolk Highlands Primary and Hickory Elementary have just received the Governor's Award for Educational Excellence, which is the highest honor in Virginia's Index of Performance program.

Deep Creek Central, E.W. Chittum and Southeastern Elementary all earned the Board of Education Excellence Award, while G.A. Treakle Elementary received the Board of Education Competency to Excellence Award.

Norfolk Highlands Primary is one of seven schools in Virginia to be nominated for the 2012 National Blue Ribbon School, while Oscar Smith Middle was named one of 10 national breakthrough schools by the MetLife Foundation and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

In the room are Linda Scott, Sonya Beasley and Kimberly Pinello. They are here today acting on behalf of Chesapeake's principals, and I want them to stand and accept our thanks, because they deserve it.

Understandably, none of this could have happened unless kids in Chesapeake weren't ready to learn, and the recognition a parent receives will never equal their obvious depth of commitment to a child's success.

It also takes a complex system of interlocking pieces to create opportunities for excellence.

From bus drivers who are inevitably the first of many entrusted with the safety of our children to members of our school board who set policy, we rely on a vast network of professionals to educate our kids.

But as good as we are – as dedicated as we may be to creating an environment where every child can succeed – I know we can do better – and we will - because we must.

What I also know is that Chesapeake's business community is more than willing to step up to the plate. . . and has.

For Oscar Smith Middle, it started with a reading session at the Clarence Cuffee Library, which led to a discussion with Principal Linda Scott, which led – in turn – to another call.

Thankfully, Jay Archbell of A & W Contractors answered. Since then, two students selected by the school for excellent academic and social standing have received BMX bikes, all courtesy of a businessman who's already done so much for so many Chesapeake students through the JCA Foundation.

But it doesn't end with Jay or bikes.

I'm happy to announce today that the Tidewater Builders Association also answered the call, and will soon be funding an AVID scholarship for a student who attended Oscar Smith Middle and advances to become a college-bound high school graduate.

Without getting into too much detail, AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, and is aimed at students that are in the academic middle. This includes B, C, and even D students who have the desire to go to college and the willingness to work hard.

On average, they will be the first in their families to go to college.

For Torrion, a college-bound Oscar Smith High School student, AVID has meant –in his words -the difference between standing in a corner and standing with scholars.

We owe a great debt to the TBA for coming forward to help give hope to others and create another opportunity for success, and now is the time to ask everyone who's a TBA member to stand and accept our thanks. . . because they deserve it.

At the same, over 20 technology firms based in our city started working together in 2011 to create the Chesapeake Technology Business Consortium.

In less than a year, this startup has created yet another startup – a summer, 2012 technology camp at Tidewater Community College in Chesapeake, which is one of the fastest growing community colleges in Virginia.

TCC Chesapeake, by the way, is already the academic home of over 16,000 students, and where – because of Deborah DiCroce’s leadership – education dreams are coming true.

Partnering with our school system and TCC Chesapeake, the consortium will bring 20 high school students there to take part in a program that will teach them about current technology in business, workplace skills, and how to obtain high-level security clearances to work for government contractors.

The consortium will also mentor small tech companies to prepare them for growth and success, be available to provide technical guidance to the city's information technology department, and act as advocates to outside firms who are considering moving to or starting their companies in Chesapeake.

Naturally, the burning question should be what this will cost Chesapeake.

Thankfully, I already know the answer: Absolutely nothing.

These businesses have decided that if we are among the top 10 percent of America's metropolitan areas when it comes to technology employment, there's no reason why Chesapeake itself can't do even better. This initiative deserves our support, and I hope you will give it.

They are, of course, right, as Chesapeake's success stories clearly demonstrate.

With patience and a great deal of support from the business community – and in spite of economic challenges – Chesapeake has transformed itself, and we aren't looking back.

In 2011, business investment was up 14 percent and over 800 new jobs were created as a result of \$163 million in business investment, marking the fourth straight year of economic growth in Chesapeake.

At the same time, businesses such as ACS, Raytheon and US Auto Parts reaffirmed their confidence in our city by renewing their leases and keeping 1,872 jobs in Chesapeake.

Envivia, a manufacturer of wood pellets and other processed biomass products, invested over \$16 million to create a port terminal, and on New Year's Eve, the first ship loaded with 28,000 metric tons of pellets left Chesapeake bound for Europe.

When it added new rail lines and storage containers to its waterfront complex, Perdue Grains invested \$7.7 million and kept 100 jobs in Chesapeake.

Simon Property Group and Cinemark Holding reinvested almost \$14 million in a new 40,000 square foot movie theater complex at Chesapeake Square Mall.

General Dynamics Information Technology, which already has two facilities and over 500 employees working here, consolidated the rest of its Hampton Roads operations and brought 80 new jobs to Chesapeake.

First Potomac bought the Greenbrier one and two office buildings for almost \$17 million. Comfort Systems of Virginia decided to expand its facilities, and IBS of America/JudCorp is doing the same.

Crewestone Technologies, a veteran, minority-owned business, invested \$2.3 million in a new corporate headquarters and brought 18 jobs to Chesapeake.

Communications Test Design, a global provider of repair and logistics services, leased almost 75,000 square feet of space at the Indian River Distribution Center, investing \$4.5 million and adding 50 new jobs.

Headquartered not far from here, ValueOptions expanded its regional presence and opened its second federal service center on Crossways Boulevard, and added 150 employees in the process.

Needless to say, other mainstay employers like Sumitomo, CKS Financial and Canon continue to create jobs in Chesapeake, and 2012 is already off to a great start.

Init and Simtech -two German-based firms already operating here -have established a business partnership and chosen Chesapeake as the home of Superior Quality Manufacturing, cementing our standing as a regional hub for international business.

Joining with Chesapeake -which has begun converting its solid-waste trucks to natural gas -TFC Recycling is converting its fleet to CNG powered trucks, and reflects the company's mission to make commercial, residential, and school recycling easier and less expensive than throwing trash in a landfill.

Our doors have always been open to companies like these, but we must also create an environment and opportunities for small business owners, and that we are doing.

On January 6, 2011, House Bill 1587 was introduced. In just over two months, the bill had been approved by the General Assembly and the Governor, and became law on July 1.

On August 16 - to create new opportunities and relieve a tax burden Chesapeake adopted a BPOL exemption ordinance that eliminates a gross receipts tax for many new companies for the first two years that they're in business.

In the words of the Virginia Federation, City Council's strategic choice to implement BPOL relief should aide economic development in the city and the region, and especially during these stringent economic times.

And if there are still those who think this might not be the best time to start a new business, I suggest they ponder this: last year, the city issued 699 new business licenses, and I do not expect that number to drop.

We are, after all, a community where we want success to be the norm and not the exception, and why our new Buy Local Initiative – one that will support local businesses – is so important.

Obviously, buying local has worked for a company like J.D. Miles and Sons, which was named the 2011 Business of the Year, and not because they've been in business for a hundred years.

In Chesapeake, Terebinth in Greenbrier's Towne Place can also celebrate because it received the Virginia Black Expo Business Leadership Award for the second year in a row. So can Russell Heating and Cooling, which was selected our 2011 Small Business of the Year.

Chesapeake is also home to UrsaNav, which made last year's list of Virginia Fantastic 50 companies, and these Chesapeake companies – Apogee Solutions, Homeland Contracting and Monarch Bank -made the Inside Business Roaring 20 list.

And Chesapeake has four other companies -Cetan, Wolf Creek, Phoenix Group and Hampton Roads Security – on the Chamber's 2011 top ten to watch list, and I congratulate them all.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the hard work of our Parks and Recreation Department and the Convention and Visitors Bureau, because they, too, play key roles in our city's economic vitality.

Chesapeake is added to all kinds of national lists because we are a naturally beautiful city with amenities and opportunities for recreation, and the folks who run our parks and recreation centers have my thanks.

And while I think sometimes we'd like to keep our little corner of paradise a secret, I can assure you that the people who work at the convention and visitors bureau aren't going to let that happen.

It also helps to have volunteers like Roland Davis, who has accepted the challenge and stepped up to chair Chesapeake's fiftieth anniversary celebration, which I hope everyone here will support.

But as good as we are – no matter that we persevered through one of the most difficult economic times since the Great Depression -we have no choice but to dream large and build big.

And that, my friends, is not rhetoric. It's reality.

In that respect, one of Chesapeake's greatest near-term accomplishments will soon cross over the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, and I cannot tell you how proud I am of the South Norfolk-Jordan Bridge.

Weather permitting, what began as a dream in December, 2008 will be open to traffic this June.

Over a mile long and towering 145 feet over the river, the South Norfolk-Jordan Bridge will have taken just over two years to build and created almost 250 jobs during one of America's darkest economic periods.

Since Figg Bridge Builders has used local suppliers and services, local businesses have benefited, too.

The good news – actually, the really great news – is that Chesapeake's investment in the new South Norfolk-Jordan Bridge amounted to nothing, while private investors demonstrated their confidence in Chesapeake's future to the tune of \$140 million, and I want Linda Figg to stand and accept our thanks for keeping the faith.

PAUSE

Just as the South Norfolk-Jordan Bridge nears completion, another big project will soon begin.

For years – and if you’ve ever been stuck there -Chesapeake has dreamt of a day when waiting for the Dominion Boulevard bridge to close would be a just memory.

For decades, the Dominion Boulevard corridor was a sleepy, little-used two-lane road spanning the Intracoastal Waterway.

Today, Dominion Boulevard -still a two lane road, still with the same lift bridge - is one of the busiest and most congested corridors in Chesapeake, not to mention one of the busiest roads of its kind in Virginia.

As for disruptions to roadway traffic -and because the clearance between the roadway and the water is relatively limited -the lift bridge is opened over 6,000 times a year.

With an average opening duration of 10 minutes, that means the bridge has been closed to traffic for the equivalent of 42 days each year. . . and I feel like I've been there for every day it's been closed.

In short – and for those who use it many times on a daily basis -Dominion Boulevard and that bridge have come to dominate daily life, and not in a positive way.

Thankfully, though, a nightmare called Dominion Boulevard will soon be changing, and I want to take a moment to thank Governor Bob McDonnell, Transportation Secretary Sean Connaughton and the Commonwealth Transportation Board, and our legislative delegations in Richmond and Washington for their confidence in Chesapeake.

With their support, Chesapeake was awarded a low interest, \$152 million loan from the Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Bank, which was the first loan from the bank.

All told, we've been able to put together \$261 million in funding, but I'm not about to let up until we've squeezed every last nickel out of every resource we can think of.

Nor will I back down on tolls.

We all know that a new Dominion Boulevard Bridge complex will require a toll to help pay for a project that will end up costing over \$400 million.

Even so, the down-stream effect of building something that has the potential to geographically divide our city must be taken into account, and I promise you it will.

Can I say what a toll might be? Until we finish adding up our pennies, the answer is no. But what I can say is that no municipal piggy bank will go uncounted or any idea left on the table.

But as important as the quality of our physical infrastructure may be – as much as it rightly demands our attention – we cannot afford to ignore the one we cannot see, but which is equally important to Chesapeake's success.

In 2010, I announced that Chesapeake had begun building a foundation to support a variety of online services for businesses and residents, and would soon be creating more opportunities for people to interact with Chesapeake on a 24/7 basis.

Our first online permit was for plumbing, and we gave laptops to our codes compliance inspectors to help them do their jobs better. Last year, we added electrical, gas and many mechanical applications to our list of ePermits, and provided our new construction inspectors with laptops to help them, too.

Using wireless technology, our inspectors can log results directly into the city database, which will allow contractors to access information on a real time basis.

Now we're testing other ways to better serve the public.

We've started small with plan submissions for structures like sheds or fences or decks, but by the end of 2012 we expect to finish building a system to make the online submission of plats and subdivision plans a reality, and add online permit applications for special events like the Dismal Swamp Stomp.

I will, by the way, never pretend to understand the intricacies of this stuff, but what I do know is that when we make it simpler and more convenient for residents and companies alike to do business in Chesapeake, life becomes a lot less complicated.

I call all of this our invisible infrastructure initiative. It's limited only by our imagination, but here are just a few examples.

Imagine using video conferencing to discuss an application or next steps with every department involved with your building project. Imagine paying your taxes at the mall. Imagine getting your permit at a hardware store, or checking out electronic books using your library card.

If you don't already, soon most of us will own a smart phone. Now imagine a Google Public Alerts Network that will deliver real time local emergency warnings that can help save lives. It's coming.

Imagine using city-owned broadband spectrum to blanket Chesapeake with a dedicated educational network that would allow teachers to have Skype-like conversations with parents. Imagine students using online textbooks, which would help reduce costs and expand a student's access to knowledge. Just imagine.

None of these things are beyond the near-term realm of possibility.

They are within our grasp, and I am convinced that if we want to remain competitive in every respect, yesterday would not have been too soon to start reaching out.

On the other hand, it never hurts for others to reach out to us, and they have.

Chesapeake was one of only 21 jurisdictions in the country selected to participate in the creation of a nationwide broadband system to connect emergency responders, and that didn't happen by chance.

In the end, a private digital wireless network will be built to connect all Chesapeake public safety personnel using a robust and reliable system that will cost less than conventional services which – in turn -will put our city at the epicenter of a nationwide network that includes live streaming video, GIS data, computer-aided dispatch and real-time location services.

These are, of course, impressive things. . . but they tell only one part of the Chesapeake story.

To paraphrase Anthony Shadid, a New York Times war correspondent who died just last week, the best stories are sometimes in the footnotes – when what we write small says something big.

Here are two footnotes I think speak volumes about our city's spirit and who we are.

The first is about a firefighter who from the age of 10 knew he wanted a career in the fire service. And so, true to form and following his dream, Jeffrey Morales joined our fire department's ranks in 1996.

For the next 11 years, this firefighter-emergency medical technician took part in life saves, fire calls and just regular pleas for help until – in late 2007 – Jeff's world was turned upside down.

What Jeff thought might be indigestion turned out to be an aortic dissection. In layman's terms, that meant that a major blood vessel was coming apart. Airlifted from Chesapeake Regional to Sentara Norfolk General, Jeff underwent surgery there and awoke 10 days later, only to be told that he would need to find another line of work.

Others might have accepted that decision, but not a kid from the South Bronx named Jeff.

It took almost two years of focused, hard work and rehabilitation for Jeff Morales to return to work, but in October, 2009 the Chesapeake Fire Department's walking miracle came back to the floor – came back to the job.

Lucky for David Hopkins that he did, since along with nurse DeeDee Webster and fire recruit Connie Cyphers, Jeff Morales was there to help save his life after he had a heart attack and collapsed on a treadmill.

Was it luck that an off-duty firefighter named Jeff just happened to be working out in the same fitness complex? We'll never know.

But what we do know is that Jeff Morales helped save another life because that's all he ever wanted to do – help others.

The last footnote is about two Chesapeake detectives who found themselves working with a crime victim -let's call him Sam – who also suffers from ALS, which some of you may know as Lou Gehrig's disease.

One of the items stolen was a 52 inch flat screen TV. Since Sam was effectively housebound by his illness, about all he could do was watch television. . . and the ability to do that had just been taken away.

Given what some detectives probably deal with on a routine basis, it might have been easy to chalk this case up to hard luck and call it done.

But Lee Hasty and Chris Bender did not.

Instead, they sought help from Sheriff John Newhart's Victim-Witness Compensation Fund. And when that wasn't enough, they added to the cost of buying a new television from their own pockets.

Except for an email I received from Chief Kelvin Wright, the odds are high that I would never have known about this footnote, this act of kindness, but now I do.

Understandably, Sam isn't with us today, but his words apply across the board to the people who keep us safe.

Quite simply, wrote Sam, I am proud of our great city and our great public servants.

PAUSE

To that, I can only say amen. Amen.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Lee Hasty and Chris Bender, and I hope you will let them know how you feel.

So here we are, telling stories.

Whether about a woman's perseverance, a young man's confidence or the generosity of our business community, these stories speak more eloquently than ever I could about the strength of our city, about the state of our Chesapeake.

You see, I think that as important as great bond ratings are, as convincing as our record of growth may be, as bright as our future may seem, it always comes down to the details. . . to the footnotes.

In Chesapeake's footnotes you will find stories about people like Debbie in planning, Rachael at the library, Antonio in waste management, Ashley from human services, Casey in public works, and Demetrius and his crew from the stormwater department.

In our footnotes you will see the names of Jerry and Steve from streets and highways, Sara in public utilities, Earl from engineering, Barbara in the treasurer's office, Thomas from codes, and Harold, who drives a street sweeper.

These footnotes tell stories of understanding, honesty and simple acts of kindness. . . they speak volumes about patience and perseverance, compassion and courtesy.

And though the footnotes may seem small, they tell big stories about a smile that overcame skepticism, about how frustration was replaced by faith and trust.

Many of us – perhaps too many of us – don't get a chance to read the footnotes, but they are really the foundation upon which a success story called Chesapeake is being built.

That story, of course, is unfinished, but this I know: my Chesapeake – our Chesapeake -is sound, and this is our breakthrough time. This is our time to imagine.

And so, confident in my city's future, I say thank you for your attention, and God bless.

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