

State of the City

Chesapeake State of the City Address

Feb. 22, 2018

Mayor Richard W. West

"The Future Starts Now"

Thank you, David, for that kind introduction, and thanks to all of you for being here today. This event is a shining example of the partnership between the City and the Chamber, with professionals from both sides coming together to make it happen and I appreciate all the effort.

I've been to many speeches like this, and I've always heard the speaker say they were "honored" or "humbled" to be there. I often thought they were just words routinely used to begin a speech. Well, let me assure you, in my case they may be words, but they are accurate words. I am humbled and honored to stand here today, a place where few who knew me as a boy would have dreamed I might stand. But perhaps it is appropriate that Chesapeake would have a mayor who reached beyond his dreams, because in essence that is the story of the City of Chesapeake.

Well over 200 years ago when the greatest orator in Virginia's history, Patrick Henry, was writing to Colonel Woodford about the Battle of Great Bridge, neither of them would have dreamed that battle in what is now Chesapeake would later be called "a second Bunker Hill affair," or that it would have such an impact on birthing the greatest nation the world has ever known.

Few could have dreamed that so many young boys trotting onto little league baseball fields across Chesapeake would one day be franchise players in pro sports.

Who would have imagined when Norfolk County and South Norfolk agreed to marry, that their offspring would become the 3rd largest city in Virginia, or that a company called "Dollar Tree" would become a Fortune 500 powerhouse in retail locations across the nation.

Yet these stories are no longer the exception in our City, because the story of Chesapeake is the story of its people, and the stories of Chesapeake's people are the combined stories of people who exceed even their own greatest dreams.

The exciting thing, however, is that the story of our future is just beginning and, like the story of our past, our future will exceed even our greatest dreams.

So I want to thank the Chamber for this opportunity to talk about that story, and thank all of you for being a part of it. I'd also like to take just a moment of, as we say on the Council dais, personal privilege to introduce some who made my story come alive.

Growing up in a family of five children, with two sisters and two brothers, created some interesting dynamics, especially considering the boys were extremely competitive. It often cause one person to be the odd guy out.

When I entered Mrs. Seawell's first grade class, I realized the boy who lived across the street and I had a lot in common. I didn't know at the time that when I looked back decades later, that that guy, Randy Forbes, would have become my lifelong friend. As you all know, Randy has done so much for our City, our Commonwealth, and our country. He has served as a Floor Leader in both the Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate, and the first member of Congress from the City of Chesapeake. He's currently a Senior Director at the largest law firm in the nation. I'm so pleased to have Randy and his equally involved and amazing wife Shirley here with us today, and I'd like to ask that they stand and be recognized.

I have four members of my family here today, including my son Jesse and my daughter Carly. They have enriched my life greatly and continue to do so every day, particularly as the parents of Jack and Trey, two of our six grandchildren. Also with us today are my sister Karen Mellott and her husband, whom I call my brother, Davis. We've shared many fond memories, and challenges, and I'm glad they could be here. Would you all please stand?

Ralph Torrech's father was a Mayor in Puerto Rico many, many years ago. Ralph came to this country, served in the United States Marine Corps, married his Kentucky bride, Patsy, rose to be a high ranking executive at Norshipco, and started a small ship repair business, now located in South Norfolk with nearly 1,000 employees. He raised three children, one of which happens to be my wife. Ralph's two sons, Michael and Larry, along with their wives, Dianne and Dixie are here today. Also with us is Vicki's son, Scott Goff who, along with his wife Sarah, has brought our amazing grandchildren Benson and Wesley to our family. Will the Torrech's please stand?

For the past 10 years, Dr. Alan Krasnoff has worked tirelessly for our City, and has accomplished so much as our Mayor. Alan welcomed me to City Council 10 years ago, and he's been my friend and supporter ever since. Please help me thank Alan for his time and energy on Chesapeake's behalf.

Speaking of Mayors, I am so pleased to have Will Sessoms with us. He's not only the Mayor of Virginia Beach, but he's done a great deal for the entire Hampton Roads region. It has been through the efforts of our local Mayors that we have made such great strides in addressing our transportation needs. Will, I have long admired your leadership and look forward to continuing to work with you on the challenges facing our region.

I also want to recognize and thank John Rowe, the Mayor of our neighbors across the Elizabeth River in Portsmouth. John brings a unique perspective to his office, having been on the administrative side of City Hall for many years, and I am equally excited about working with him and the Portsmouth City Council on a variety of future projects.

There are three individuals here in the City of Chesapeake who, along with their dedicated staffs, deserve both special acknowledgement and thanks. City Manager Jim Baker, City Attorney Jan Proctor, and City Clerk Sandy Madison each lead skilled teams of men and

women truly dedicated to charting Chesapeake's strong future, and I am grateful for their service, their friendship, and their commitment.

Chesapeake has never had a shortage of leaders, and one I particularly want to note is our former Commissioner of the Revenue, Ray Conner. If you were to look up the phrase, "Servant Leader," I am certain you'd find Ray's photo. From helping bring back the 1st Citizen award, to spearheading the Paint Your Heart Out campaign, to leading the fight against a mega-landfill on our southern border, Ray has been there whenever and wherever Chesapeake needed him, and I appreciate his service.

So much of what I am today was learned as a student and teacher at Great Bridge High School. Our green and gold family was saddened earlier this week at the passing of Harry Blevins, a man who was equal parts mentor, leader, role model, and so much more. It would take a speech unto itself to list all that Harry did for his students, his neighbors, and his community, but we all know Harry wouldn't like that sort of fuss. Rather, I'd ask that you join me in a brief moment of silence to remember this great leader and friend.....

Thank you. Chesapeake students have been blessed with many great leaders like Harry, who have shaped our schools into some of the best in Virginia. Leaders like Carolyn Bernard, a protégé of Harry's who led Crestwood Middle and Great Bridge High before moving on to open Grassfield High School and set it on a path for success. Or Jimmy Calhoun, who spent 20 years at Harry's side, helping shape not only Great Bridge students, but Great Bridge teachers and staff, as well. People like Art Brandriff in Western Branch, Nat Hardy in Deep Creek, Jimmy Frye in Indian River, Linda Byrd in Hickory, and Paul Joseph at Oscar Smith have all made an impact and will, through those they've mentored and trained, for years to come.

I was privileged to work with great leaders like these, and so many more, during my 30 years in the Chesapeake Schools. Each day, they help shape the future stories for our children, making the Schools one of our strongest assets and a key reason why people, and companies, want to call Chesapeake home. To my education colleagues in the audience, thanks for all you do.

Throughout my life, I feel that God has provided me Angels to get through difficult times and help me see who He is. My latest Angel is sitting right here in front....my wife, Vicky. Please stand....I could go on for hours talking about her and what she means to me, but that's not why we are here. So, I will put it simply - thank you, Vicky, for brightening my future, even as I talk about the future of our great City of Chesapeake.

Let me begin by asking you to look across the table at those sitting opposite you. Look around, too, at those sitting near you. Each person you see, and each person everyone else in this room sees, is part of the future of our great City of Chesapeake. The 800 or so people in this room, along with the almost 245,000 people who call our city home and the thousands more who come here each day to work, shop, and play are the future of Chesapeake.

Our City is strong, vibrant, growing, welcoming, and much more. It's been that way for 55 years now, and it's both my hope and my goal that it always will be. But make no mistake,

Chesapeake stands at a crucial crossroads today. We face challenges from the very things that make us strong - our growth, our need for infrastructure and quality services, and our desire to be the city of choice for living, working, and raising a family.

My friends, our future, Chesapeake's future, starts now, and it starts with each of us. Our dreams, our hopes, our goals, and our wishes - coupled with those around us - will set the course for our City's future. So, what do you hope the future Chesapeake will look and feel like? Here's a look at how some of your neighbors answered that very question.

As you can see, we've got a lot of big dreams for our future. That's good - that's how it should be. None other than Walt Disney himself said simply, "If you can dream it, you can do it." Here in Chesapeake, we've always dreamed, and we never stop doing.

Chesapeake has always been a community with big dreams and lofty goals. In 1963, leaders from Norfolk County and the City of South Norfolk looked into the future and saw the benefits of merging together for their common good. As it says on the City Seal "One Increasing Purpose." The union brought together the rural heritage of Norfolk County and the urban energy of South Norfolk. That coexistence hasn't always been easy, and there hasn't always been total agreement. But I think you'll agree that, on the whole, we've done very well.

Today, as leaders in the community in both government and business, it's up to us to see that both aspects - rural and urban - continue to coexist and thrive in ways that continue to increase all of our purposes. There's no question this is a tough balancing act, but one that will pay dividends far into the future. The course we set today, with managed growth and a commitment to preserve both open spaces and agricultural opportunities, will guide Chesapeake for decades to come.

We're already making strides in this direction, having recently formed three new committees to help set us on that future path. Focusing on Technology, which we know will play a key role in everything we do, Sustainability, because if we can't sustain our great way of life, then really what's the point, and the implementation of our Comprehensive Plan, each committee will have a lot to do, and a lot of talent to get it done. I'd like to ask the members of these committees to please stand so we can thank you for your commitment and all the hard work you are about to put in.

Our rural roots are something we cherish and celebrate here in Chesapeake, evidenced by our desire to foster farming both large and small. The City's Farmer's Markets, which cater to residents' desire for locally-sourced, fresh foods are popular week in and week out, giving smaller farmers an economic outlet for their wares. Chesapeake-grown crops from our larger farms move through the port and across the roadways every day, as well.

We're looking closely at where development in Chesapeake will go, and what forms it may take. We know, for instance, that both the Route 168 and Route 17 corridors are prime areas for growth. But we're mindful, too, that growing can mean change, and while that's not always a bad thing, it's one that takes both careful, professional analysis and a commitment to both hear from and work with those whom change will most directly affect. These things we are committed to do - to reach out, to listen, to understand, and then to

move forward in ways that bring the greatest benefits to the greatest numbers of our citizens, today and tomorrow.

It takes people to make the future happen. People with skills; People with desire; People with vision; and People with commitment to navigate the challenges, adapt to change, and see it through.

Thankfully, those exact sorts of people are something Chesapeake has in abundance, starting off with my colleagues on the City Council. We don't always agree or even come close on some issues, but that is actually a very good thing. If we all saw the future through the same lens, we'd be missing a great deal of opportunity.

What we do agree upon, though, is a shared goal to seek consensus, work together, pool our ideas, and do the best things possible for our City. All 8 of my Council colleagues and I take a strong, very personal ownership of our City's future, and we're committed to ensuring that tomorrow's Chesapeake will be a better, safer, healthier, and more welcoming place for everyone. I'd like to ask the members of the Council to please stand as a group and be recognized for your continued dedication and service.

Commitment and Chesapeake go hand-in-hand, and that's no where more evident than in the work of our almost 4,000 City employees. I would stack our staff up against any municipality of any size, anywhere. They truly are superstars in my book.

Every day, these dedicated men and women keep our City humming. They do their work with pride, skill, and commitment. They build on past successes, learn from things that might have gone better, and keep us focused on that future we all covet.

In just one example of these efforts, during 2017 our Public Utilities Department renegotiated our water purchase contract with our friends in Portsmouth, saving the City more than \$75 million over the next 10 years, and assuring us a safe, reliable water supply through the middle of the century. All that, while also helping Portsmouth guarantee a steady customer for their water. The new contract also allowed the City Council to eliminate the previously approved 4.9% water and sewer rate increase for 2017. Now let me repeat that, we saved \$75 million and eliminated a rate increase all in one process - I'd call that a positive future by any definition.

I'm also excited to announce today that our Public Utilities team has come to an agreement in principal with the owners of the AquaVirginia water company for the City to purchase that firm's water service holdings in Indian River. This has been an area of great concern for residents, due to issues with water quality and service, but once the company and City Council give final approvals, those customers will join the rest of Chesapeake in receiving high quality water for all their needs. Here again, we're writing the future story today, as we look toward a successful tomorrow for this vital area of the City.

From our public safety personnel who keep us safe, secure, and healthy, to the field forces keeping the water flowing in and the trash rolling out, to those helping our most vulnerable citizens and those looking to have some fun, they are the face of Chesapeake. And consider this, for every City employee you see on the streets at work, there are an equal number behind the scenes, making sure the bills get paid, the "I's" get dotted and the "T's" crossed,

and that their teammates have the tools needed to get the job done. We're fortunate to have this level of skill and enthusiasm at our disposal, so let's take a look at some of the ways our City employees keep us focused on the future.

Chesapeake's support of, and gratitude for, the members of our military and their families is something we take very seriously. And we're equally proud that so many veterans call our City their home. In 2017, the City went another step further, as we dedicated the Dominion Boulevard Veterans Bridge project to be a Blue Star Highway. For those who might not know, the Blue Star that you often see on flags and windows shows that that family has someone serving in the military. At this time, if you are a member of a Blue Star Family, would you please stand and accept our thanks for your loved one's service.

The foundation for Chesapeake's bright future rests, in great part, on you and your colleagues in our thriving business community. The City is home to thousands of businesses, from the smallest one-person company to our largest employers, with hundreds of employees. Each and every business matters to our City - to its growth, to its vitality, and to its future.

Chesapeake's attraction for business knows no bounds; certainly, it knows no borders, as we are home to companies from Europe to Asia, and everywhere in between. Companies like Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Yupo, and Volvo Penta made the choice to come to Chesapeake years ago and and they've never looked back.

As they have grown and prospered, so has the City. The wages they and hundreds like them pay their employees, and the taxes they pay, are among the life blood of our future.

Of course, it's not just about the money. I will say here and now, without any question, that Chesapeake has some of the most generous, most caring, and most committed corporate citizens of any city, anywhere.

Among our many local success stories I could highlight is Dan Bannister, from Bannister Nissan. It's his name on the company now, but it's been his heart, his soul, and his drive all along that's grown their dealership into a local powerhouse. Dan, can you also stand and accept our appreciation?

It's companies like Priority Automotive, whose visionary leader Dennis Elmer supports so many great causes and goes far above the norm in backing his employees as they do good work throughout Chesapeake. Dennis, please stand so we can acknowledge you for all you do.

I was privileged last fall to be part of the announcement that ForKids, a leader in helping families in crisis, will be bringing their headquarters to South Norfolk in a new building on the site of the old Library, bringing jobs and in excess of \$12 million in capital investment to that vital part of the City. This project, more than any other in recent memory, shows the power of partnership as the community, the City, and the organization came together to make it happen. Residents of South Norfolk have embraced ForKids and are making them feel welcome, even before the doors are in place, much less opened. It's this sort of warm outreach that makes our City so attractive to companies and organizations. Thaler

McCormick, CEO of ForKids is with us today and I want to publicly thank her and their entire organization for making Chesapeake their home. Thaler...

Ever since I joined the City Council, when we heard from the people in Western Branch, the chorus was the same - "Do Something About The Mall." Well, we've heard you and today I've got an exciting announcement - The Mall has been sold and it's future is already brightening. You heard that right, Chesapeake Square Mall has a new owner, following a purchase by the Kotarides Companies. They've got some great things planned for that area, anchoring a continued resurgence of Chesapeake's western border and I want to recognize them for their support by asking the Kotarides Team to please stand.

I would be remiss if I didn't also take a moment to acknowledge our great partners at Tidewater Community College, which is celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year. With a wide array of courses, including four dual enrollment career and technical pathways for our high school students, TCC is helping train the men and women who will shape tomorrow's Chesapeake. Please join me in thanking Dr. Edna V. Baehre-Kolovani and all of the TCC faculty and staff for their lasting commitment to our future.

The leaders I've just highlighted, and thousands like them, have their eyes firmly on the future, and I can't wait to see where that future leads. Let's take a brief look at some of the business highlights from 2017.

We couldn't possibly show you every business story from the last year, or we'd have to call this the State of the City Marathon, but I think you can see clearly that there is a lot going on, a lot to talk about, and a lot to be excited about here in our great City.

I've had the pleasure to attend a lot of grand openings and ribbon cuttings over the years and there are some things that all great companies seem to share. They trust in God. They put family first, while caring about their employees and their customers. And they insist on the highest quality in their products and services. I guess, though, that this is not a surprise, since those are the same sorts of values we all strive for, throughout the Chesapeake community.

As we look towards our future, one thing is clearly evident: if we don't continue to embrace the ever-changing and ever-developing world of technology, we are going to quickly be left behind. We've got some of the best and brightest helping us do just that, though, so I am not worried.

Last fall, Chesapeake joined with the other Hampton Roads municipalities to endorse a new, high speed fiber optic "ring" for our region, which will link our communities on a technology superhighway. It will bring us high-paying jobs, create a secure, connected emergency response asset, and provide critical online educational content and tools for our urban and regional areas. Truly, a shining example of regional partnerships, and an arena in which Chesapeake intends to take a leading role. Our goal for fiber and wireless is for our businesses to have the highest speeds at the lowest cost so they can attract the best employees and gain a competitive edge worldwide by being located in Chesapeake.

I am also pleased to announce that this fall, Chesapeake will begin to go wireless. A private provider, Wildfire, will start implementing a high speed wireless blanket to cover 80% or

more of Chesapeake over 2 years. No matter if our citizens live in rural, suburban or urban areas of our city, the internet will be available at home, on the way to work - anywhere for a low monthly cost.

As you leave today, the Economic Development Department will share with you a copy of Chesapeake's Annual Report, highlighting the accomplishments of several other corporate citizens - Hoffman Beverage.....Standard Calibrations.....RFK Solutions.....and The Big Ugly. Though they come from a number of different sectors and sizes of business, these companies stand as perfect examples of the diversity of Chesapeake's business community, and are proof that no matter what business you do, Chesapeake is the place to do business.

The Annual Report will also tell you the Chesapeake business story by the numbers, and I'd like to highlight a couple of key points. Total capital investments in the City topped \$204 million last year and more than 500 new businesses opened their doors in Chesapeake. If those aren't an indicator that our future is bright, I don't know what is. With businesses like those I've just highlighted already here, with a commitment to technology growth, and with a quality of life second-to-none, how can any business, of any size, not want to make Chesapeake its home?

Of course, no discussion of the future of business development in Chesapeake would be complete without talking about what's been called the greatest corporate project in the City's history. You all know what I'm talking about, and you're already seeing it becoming a reality if you drive through Greenbrier. It's the Summit Point development on Volvo Parkway, anchored by their largest tenant, Dollar Tree.

Excitement is growing right along with the steel, glass, and concrete that make up this new, mixed-use development. We as a City are thrilled with the project, but we're equally pleased to have a company with Dollar Tree's community commitment so entrenched here in Chesapeake. A lot of those dollar bills that come into the stores go right back out into local charitable coffers, and I speak for all those helped when I say thank you to Dollar Tree for their generosity.

Now, it's my pleasure to do something a little different in a State of the City speech. Usually, this is a Mayor-Only show. But when Bob Sasser, the Executive Chairman of Dollar Tree, says he'd like to make a big announcement, a smart Mayor says, "come share the stage and let me get out of the way." So, I'm going to do just that and ask Bob to come up and share some exciting news with you. Bob....

Talk about ending a speech on a high note! Bob, thanks for being with us today and thanks even more for Dollar Tree's commitment to the future of Chesapeake. Those of you who know Bob know that his is a quiet, confident leadership style, and it's one that I admire highly. He is a man committed to his people, his company, and his community, and we are fortunate to have him here in Chesapeake. We've been able to do great things together in the past, but that's only a prelude for what's to come, and I, for one, look forward to what's next.

My friends, the story of our Future Starts Now. We all get to write it. It's time to get up, get going, to be excited, and to be confident that Chesapeake's story, our story, will exceed

even our greatest dreams. Thank you for coming today. Thank you for your commitment, and may God continue to bless the City we call Chesapeake.

The full State of the City address can be viewed online, on-demand at www.CityOfChesapeake.net/TV.

It is scheduled to rebroadcast on WCTV, Cox 48 and Verizon 43, at the following times:

- 8 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 22
- 10 a.m., 4 p.m. and 8 p.m., Friday, Feb. 23
- 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 24

This is the final written draft of the address. As with all speeches, Mayor West added or deleted words in certain places as he spoke. This is not intended to be a word-for-word transcript of the speech