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The Catalyst

A Message from the President

On this day in history, November 24, 1969, the Apollo 12 spacecraft safely splashed down in the Pacific, bringing home brave astronauts and marking the success of America's second crewed Moon mission. It's a powerful reminder that bold goals, careful planning, and steady coordination can carry a vision into reality—qualities we lean on today as we work to accelerate economic development here on the Virginia Peninsula.

We're also navigating a shifting political landscape in Richmond. With a more progressive majority in the Virginia House of Delegates and a Democratic governor returning to office, we're likely to see new debates on regulations, labor policy, and business climate. Some proposals may challenge traditional frameworks, and while that can be difficult, it also presents an opportunity: by engaging thoughtfully, we can help shape policy in a way that fuels economic growth rather than stifles it.

That's exactly what your Chamber's Public Policy team is doing. We're already gearing up for the upcoming General Assembly session. We'll be tracking legislation, advocating for policies that support innovation and competitiveness, and keeping you — our members — informed every step of the

As we head into Thanksgiving, I want to wish you and your families a warm, joyful holiday. This is a time to slow down, reflect, and give thanks for the ties that bind us. I'm grateful for your continued partnership, your passion for this region, and all the ways you contribute to making the Virginia Peninsula stronger every day.

From all of us at the Chamber, have a wonderful, family-filled Thanksgiving.



Bob McKenna
President/CEO,
[Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)



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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT *news*



Virginia Peninsula Economic Development Update

By Bob McKenna, [Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)

for advanced technology. Last week, Governor Glenn Youngkin joined local leaders for the grand opening of CEL Critical Power's U.S. manufacturing facility, a \$5.2 million investment expected to create 250 jobs initially, expanding to 500 by 2030.



CEL produces critical power systems designed to support next-generation AI computing and data center infrastructure. The company is also tapping into the DOD Skillbridge program, offering veterans pathways into these high-tech roles — a win for both the company and our skilled local workforce.

William & Mary Named U.S. AUKUS Center of Excellence

[William & Mary](#) has been designated the U.S. academic home of the AUKUS submarine and defense innovation partnership, joining centers in the U.K. and Australia.



WILLIAM & MARY
CHARTERED 1693

This center will drive joint research and development on submarine production, workforce training, and defense technology innovation, reinforcing the Peninsula's long-standing role in maritime defense and advanced manufacturing. It positions the region as a global leader in defense technology while building a pipeline of highly skilled talent for the local workforce.



Hampton Roads Regional Investment Playbook Rollout

[The Hampton Roads Alliance](#) is advancing the region's economic future through the rollout of its Regional Investment Playbook, a strategic framework built around four key pillars — Defense, Energy, Aerospace, and Logistics (DEAL).

For the Virginia Peninsula, this Playbook is particularly impactful:

- **Defense & Aerospace:** Reinforces shipbuilding, naval, and defense technology growth.
- **Energy:** Supports advanced energy projects and resilience initiatives that can bring new industries to the Peninsula.
- **Logistics:** Leverages the region's transportation and port assets to attract companies and supply chains.
- **Workforce & Innovation:** Promotes talent development, research collaborations, and tech acceleration programs.

The Playbook provides a blueprint for coordinated regional investment, project alignment, and long-term economic growth. By linking localities, leveraging infrastructure, and focusing on high-growth sectors, it strengthens the Peninsula's role as a critical part of the broader Hampton Roads economic ecosystem.





Harnessing AI for Hampton Roads' Future

By Bob McKenna, [Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)

The Virginia Peninsula Chamber's Rising Tide series explored how artificial intelligence is shaping economic growth on the Peninsula. Our recent event, **"Harnessing AI for Hampton Roads' Future,"** brought together local leaders to show how AI is moving from concept to reality in our region.

[Newport News Shipbuilding](#) is using AI to improve design, safety, and productivity.

[Riverside Health System](#) is transforming care delivery and data management.

[Old Dominion University](#), in partnership with Google, is launching an AI incubator to be a central innovation hub, powered by Google Cloud, where ODU can accelerate discovery, boost student success, and partner with the community to build real-world AI solutions.

Panelists **Meg Atkins** (Riverside), **Brian Fields** (Newport News Shipbuilding), and **Dr. Chrysoula Malogianni** (ODU) shared insights on AI's current use, future evolution, workforce impact, and local relevance.

A lively Q&A capped the event, giving attendees a chance to engage directly with AI experts and explore practical applications for business and economic growth.

Peninsula have the talent, institutions, and innovation potential to lead in the AI economy — and the Chamber is committed to helping our region seize that opportunity.



LEGISLATIVE *update*



Public Policy Update

By Chris Davidson, Government Relations Consultant

The first wave of 2026 General Assembly bills has dropped! As expected, House Democrats have reintroduced a slate of measures that were previously passed and then vetoed, ranging from minimum wage and paid sick leave to housing and utility costs. At the same time, Republicans have filed tax relief proposals aimed at making permanent the enhanced standard deduction and earned income tax credit.

For Peninsula employers, especially small businesses operating on thin

Chamber's legislative priorities, and how we're approaching them from a strongly pro-business, pro-growth perspective.

[READ MORE](#)

BUSINESS *tips*

5 Key AI Applications for Small Businesses

By [SCORE Williamsburg](#).

AI can elevate small business performance in several ways:

- Chatbots automate customer service, providing 24/7 support.
- Marketing tools personalize campaigns, optimize ads, and create content.
- Operational AI streamlines tasks like inventory, scheduling, and data entry.
- Analytics platforms reveal trends, predict customer behavior, and support smarter decisions.
- AI content tools quickly generate posts, website copy, and marketing materials—saving valuable time.

For updates and free expert guidance on these and other small business challenges, visit SCORE at <https://www.score.org/williamsburg>.



LEAD HIGHER *recap*



Dynamics Session

By Caroline Branch, [Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)

On November 4th, the LEAD Higher Class of 2025 gathered at [Christopher Newport University](#) for the final session of the inaugural program. The session was co-facilitated by Kathleen Callahan PhD., William M. Donaldson PhD., and Lacey Grey Hunter M. Ed. from Christopher Newport University. Participants engaged in four dynamic roundtable discussions centered on Strategic Planning, Adaptive Leadership, Leading Across the Divide, Team Building, Leading Across Generations, and Wicked Questions About Leadership. Each discussion encouraged meaningful dialogue and deeper exploration of key leadership concepts previously introduced throughout the program. The day concluded with an overall debrief, during which the LEAD Higher Class of 2025 reflected on major takeaways and highlights from their experience in the program.

LEAD PENINSULA *recap*



History, Hospitality, & Tourism Day

By Jaime Parrish, [Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)

presentation on Sports Tourism by current class member Jay Richardson, followed by a guided tour of the [Hampton Virginia Aquaplex](#), a premier aquatic facility that has quickly become a regional destination. Participants then visited the [Virginia Air and Space Science Center](#), where three passionate docents provided an overview of the museum's exhibits and programs. The class also heard from Dr. Jeffery Smith, Executive Director and CEO, who shared his vision for the Center's continued impact on education and community engagement. The next stop was [The Mariners' Museum and Park](#), recognized by the U.S. Congress as America's National Maritime Museum. Two docents led an informative tour highlighting the museum's world-class collections and exhibits, followed by remarks from Howard H. Hoege III, President and CEO, who spoke about the importance of Connectedness through Culture and the museum's role in fostering that mission. The day concluded at the [Virginia Living Museum](#), where Rebecca Kleinhample, Executive Director and CEO, welcomed the class and highlighted the museum's newest feature - the Animal Wellness Center. The tour provided valuable insight into the museum's ongoing commitment to conservation, education, and animal care.

Thank you to the History, Hospitality, and Tourism Day Sponsors:

Exclusive Transportation Sponsor – [Oleta Coach Lines, Inc.](#)

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Supporting Sponsors – [The Mariners' Museum and Park](#), [Virginia Air and Space Science Center](#), and [Virginia Living Museum](#)

LEAD ALUMNI *news*



AI Workshop

By Jaime Parrish, [Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)

Artificial Intelligence is Transforming Work," was facilitated by [Timothy Wyatt](#), Director of IT at York County.

Registration is open for the **LEAD Alumni Network's Annual Holiday Party**; scheduled for Tuesday, December 2, 2025 from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM. Join us for a festive evening filled with laughter, delicious treats, and great company! This is your chance to catch up with old friends, and make new ones, while celebrating the season in true LAN style. Event highlights include a cookie swap, ugly sweater contest, team trivia, and a toy drive. *Please note this event is for current participants and graduates of the LEAD Higher and LEAD Peninsula programs.*

Save the Dates for upcoming Alumni events:

- **State of Poverty Simulation - Volunteer Opportunity** | January 8, 2026 | 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM | Alumni Only
 - **VTOP Training Session** | February 26, 2026 | 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM | Open to the Public
-

UPCOMING *events*

[December 3, 2025](#)

Start, Grow, Thrive

[December 9, 2025](#)

State of the Chamber

[December 3, 2025](#)

State of the City - Hampton

[December 12, 2025](#)

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

[December 4, 2025](#)

Pink Bag Lunch

RSVP NOW



NEW MEMBER *spotlight*

Southern Comfort Restaurant & Lounge

[Southern Comfort Restaurant & Lounge](#) is dedicated to offering customers one of the finest dining experiences and event spaces of the Hampton Roads Area while providing “Southern Comfort” fine dining, spirits, and a unique atmosphere in every corner of our establishment.



The concept of “Southern Comfort” is to shed light on the history and techniques associated with soul food. We strive to embrace the culture from which “soul food” came from. Food tells stories and sometimes the history makes you appreciate a certain cuisine a little more.

Southern Comfort is motivated to move to the next level in comfort cuisine, event space, and hospitality. Our goal is to provide customers with attention to detail, unique spirits, entertainment, with our “Southern Comfort” charm. Besides providing top quality services and products at a reasonable price, our focus is to serve customers quickly in a comfortable establishment.

LEARN MORE



Please join us in welcoming the following new members - our future CHAMPIONS - to the Virginia Peninsula Chamber!

- [Family Bond llc](#)
- [Keen Alliance Consulting](#)
- [Premier Rapport](#)
- [TownePlace Suites Newport News Airport](#)
- [Vantra Building Services](#)
- [Resolute Auto Detailing](#)
- [Southern Comfort Restaurant & Lounge](#)
- [Two Maids](#)

Contact Us:

info@vpcc.org

11850 Merchants Walk, Suite 110 | Newport News, VA 23606

www.VaPeninsulaChamber.com

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