

Forward Thinking

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Let's Tell the Stories of Who Moved Here, Not Those Who Left

by Joel Rubin,
Managing Editor



My “day job” as many of you know is as writer and editor of It’s WINDSday, which ostensibly focuses on wind and renewable energy, workforce development, and environmental protection

but also small businesses, the latter through the stories of the courageous, creative and capable people who started them.

Take Lori Verity, an Air Force “brat” who after college at Ohio State came to Norfolk to study cooking at the since departed Johnson & Wales. Out of market jobs followed at prestigious hotels, but Lori (4th from right in the picture above) yearned to return to Hampton Roads. With a partner, she scrimped and saved and started on a shoestring Yummy Goodness, now a booming catering concern with TowneBank as its top client. “Lots of people tell me that once you’ve lived here, you always want to come back.” She sure did and is now raising a son here, perhaps another entrepreneur.



Or Kip Poole, native of Portsmouth and grad of Virginia Tech’s hospitality department who would take a culinary program at a Title I high school in Delaware from 40 to 200 kids before coming home to Hampton Roads. He would eventually become chief chef for VB Schools, then in 2024 take a leap of faith, opening Yorkie’s Deli that he has turned into a classroom of sorts. “With the help of friends and students, we have a vegetable garden out back, growing crops we cook in the restaurant. We then compost the scraps and use the soil to grow more. Nothing goes in the landfill. I hire teenagers to show them the life cycle of food.”

Then there’s Juan “Rafa” Famanía, whose Puerto Rican mother urged him to join his sister in eastern Virginia where he would soon learn a valuable trade, welding on aluminum ships. Thanks to his encouraging young wife Natalia, he launched his own firm, JRF Ship Repair in Portsmouth, and is living in a

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To suggest a topic and a writer, visit <https://futureofhamptonroads.org/forwardthinking>

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Hampton Roads Must Imagine Boldly and Build Decisively

By Charlie O'Brien

Hampton Roads is more than a cluster of coastal cities. It is a living workshop for American audacity, a shoreline where continent and ocean meet to remind us that horizons are meant for crossing. Our shipyards lengthened the nation's naval reach, our wind tunnels helped pilots break the sound barrier, and our ports welcomed markets that recast the country's economy. Those victories matter, yet I believe a region must be measured as fiercely by its appetite for the future as by its reverence for the past. Every sunset over the Elizabeth River asks the same question: what brave craft will launch here tomorrow, and who will dare to build it?

Artificial intelligence is my chosen instrument because it exists precisely where imagination crystallizes into execution. Models iterate, algorithms adapt, and yesterday's miracle becomes today's baseline. My vocation is to balance on that shifting edge, just long enough to prove the next step, then invite neighbors to stand on the ground I have tested while I venture forward again. Whether I design agentic systems that eliminate operational drag or assemble tools that let diverse companies multiply their influence, each project is a pilot for Hampton Roads, evidence that our home can compete with the legendary workshops of Silicon Valley and Manhattan.

Yet no individual rewires a culture alone. That conviction sparked the Gen Z Commission, a council of young truth tellers committed to hearing and addressing the needs of our generation across the region. We roam festivals, campuses, and waterfront promenades with tiny microphones, collecting the unfiltered hopes and frustrations of students, sailors, coders, and creatives. Those street level voices travel from raw audio to data driven proposals on housing, transit, finance, and media. City councils, planning departments, and economic development boards invite us to translate those insights into strategies that serve Gen Z with precision and respect.

Progress is a relay, and I run with teammates whose pace lifts my own.

Together we are proving a clear truth. The future is not a distant landmark to be discovered someday. It is an active construction zone that demands hard hats, fresh blueprints, and a chorus of voices encouraging one another to reach higher. Hampton Roads already holds every raw material it needs: talent that spans generations, diversity that sparks creativity, and a history of relentless reinvention. What remains is the daily courage to imagine ideas large enough to unsettle us

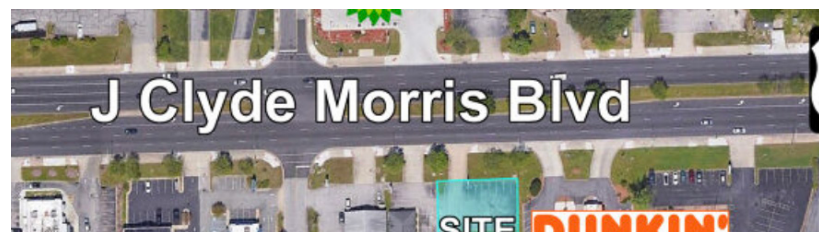
slightly, the discipline to plan them well, and the decisive will to act before the thrill fades. I will keep pressing toward the outer edge of possibility, rallying new partners, and ensuring that the next generation can claim this region for their boldest ideas as confidently as they claim it for its proud history.

23 year old Charlie O'Brien, a native of the Bronx and graduate of McGill University, is Senior Product and Operations Manager at 757 Collab. He is chairman of the independent Hampton Roads' Gen-Z Commission and serves on the Board of the Future of Hampton Roads.



From Left to Right: Ben Green, Sanele Lasana, Cameron Taylor, Charlie O'Brien of Gen Z Commission

— FT Trivia —
Who was J. Clyde Morris?
— answer on page 4 —



Being Present: How Communities In Schools Measures Success Beyond the Numbers

By Hope Sinclair, PhD, Executive Director, CISofHR

Maya was just 11 and fighting a rare, aggressive cancer. Her pain often showed up as anger — a reaction her peers and teachers noticed but didn't fully understand. Lucky for Maya that her elementary was part of Communities In Schools (CIS). Her site coordinator (SC) created a safe space where Maya could speak openly about her fears. As trust grew, so did the child's outlook. She began smiling more, sharing victories, like her hair growing back after chemo, and friends took notice of her "inspiring attitude."

32 schools in seven Hampton Roads cities have CIS, a nearly 50-year-old program in 26 states and Washington D.C. Our work centers build trusting relationships with students who face barriers often invisible to the broader education system — food insecurity, homelessness, trauma, and lack of consistent adult support.

We embed SC's inside public schools to connect students and families with the academic or other resources they need to succeed. But our impact can't be summed up by a single test score or attendance sheet. We believe that simply "being present" is the first step to positive outcomes.

Our progress is tracked through the ABCs:



Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance — leading indicators of whether students will complete high school. Last year, CISofHR served over 23,000, with 97% of our case-managed seniors graduating, being "relentlessly present" the secret.

When site coordinators step in to help stabilize a student's life, teachers and administrators gain back valuable instructional and management time. Now educators don't have to

carry the full weight of every crisis — they have a partner in us. Thanks in no small part to CIS, 76% of students improve attendance, 90% behave better, 80% do better in their subjects, and 96% of graduates have a solidified plan after school.

To deepen our impact, we need more: more behavioral health professionals, more flexible funding to meet immediate demands, and more community partners who treat student advocacy as a shared responsibility. We're not asking for charity — we're inviting investment in the "Future of Hampton Roads." You can learn more at <https://cisofhamptonroads.org>.

Imagine a region where every school has a full-time CISofHR SC, where extra support isn't the exception, it's the standard, and where every student has someone in his or her corner.

Clean Energy is Becoming our Next Economic Pillar in Hampton Roads

By Matt Smith, Director of Energy and Emerging Technologies, Hampton Roads Alliance

Over a single week this spring, two signature events attracted the attention of the renewable energy industry worldwide to Hampton Roads.

One was the International Partnering Forum that brought hundreds of business leaders, academics and others to Virginia Beach to learn about the current status of offshore wind development here in the US and around the globe.

Clean energy, continued on Page 5

Our First “Forward Thinkers” Were Those Courageous Virginians Willing to Sacrifice for Freedom

By Peter Shaw and Joel Rubin

As we commence the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War, here’s a feature we introduce in this issue. In our view, among the first real Forward Thinkers in America were the men and women, slave and free, who had to make life and death decisions. “Do we join the Patriot cause, risking our lives, families and perhaps fortunes? Or do we take the seemingly safer path and remain loyal to the Crown?” Clearly those who signed on with the rebellious militias envisioned a time when they might control their own fates but through a democratic system yet to be created and by men in their own and other colonies they did not yet know.

So with the help of experts on that critical period, we will profile some Forward Thinkers of 1775-1781, all from our region, some you’ve heard of, some you have not. Our principal resource will be Patrick Hannum, who served for 45 years in the Department of Defense, 29 as a Marine Assault Amphibious Vehicle Officer and 16 as a civilian professor at the Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University. “I love learning about the American Revolution and sharing what I know,” says Hannum, who is active in the Norfolk Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Foundation and the City of Virginia Beach 250 Committee, one of several in the area that are planning and staging programs, including a reenactment of the pivotal Skirmish at Kemps Landing in November, 1775.

Hannum is in awe of our ancestors who took up arms against King George III. “These Revolutionary War ‘Forward Thinkers’ were highly motivated for liberty and demonstrated great leadership,” he says. “They knew full well the British had the most powerful military in the world, but they believed in the promise of a new nation.”

Many of our best-known patriots were young. Thomas Jefferson was 33 when he wrote the Declaration of Independence, Patrick Henry 39 when he told Lord Dunmore to “give me liberty or give me death.” James Madison was 25 in 1776, Billy Flora, a free black man considered a hero of the pivotal Battle of Great Bridge, which took place 250 years ago this coming December, was 19. You will meet Flora and others, like Thomas Matthews of Norfolk, who rose through the ranks of both the army and the Virginia legislature to become its first speaker in Richmond.

If you are a closet Ken Burns or Pat Hannum, eager to share your knowledge of eastern Virginians (some could be your own ancestors) who took the plunge in 1775-1781 to make us free, email pshaw111355@gmail.com. Given that the slogan for our state’s 250 commemoration is “America: Made in Virginia,” there’s no better time to tell that history.



Local historian Pat Hannum
at the monument
commemorating the Skirmish
at Kemps Landing in November 1775



FTTrivia Who was J. Clyde Morris?

Over 32 years in public service, James Clyde Morris was manager of the short-lived City of Warwick (1952-1958) before it merged with Newport News. He would become the first executive director of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Commission, which funded, built and operates that historic span that opened in 1964. Currently the CBBT is adding a second two lane tunnel connecting two of its islands.

Clean Energy, cont. from page 3



Matt Smith

....And while that was happening at the Convention Center, South Korean company L.S. Greenlink staged the groundbreaking for a \$681 million submarine cable manufacturing facility along the southern branch of the Elizabeth River in Chesapeake, the largest industrial investment our region has seen in decades.

IPF and L.S. Greenlink represented great lifts for us at the Hampton Roads Alliance, which focuses on business

attraction and expansion across our 15 localities. We devote significant “energy” to the need for more electricity generation in our area, a quest informed by the 2022 Virginia Energy Plan that called for on an “all



of the above approach to include natural gas and renewables and the embrace of innovation and emerging technologies.” Three years later, the demand for abundant, affordable, clean energy has only grown.

Well out in the Atlantic, Dominion Energy is constructing the nation’s largest offshore wind farm, Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW). This “forward thinking” developer is demonstrating to its counterparts around the world that mega-scale wind projects can be built on time and on budget. Because the equipment for CVOW arrives from overseas at and then departs to the wind farm from

Clean Energy, cont. on page 8

To Get International Flights Will Take State and Local Incentives

It’s long been asked in these parts: how can you have an international airport but no passenger flights to international destinations?

It’s a good question, and in a presentation to the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) in May, Norfolk “International” Airport President/CEO Mark Perryman offered an explanation and road map for flights to say London, Paris, Rome, Amsterdam, Cancun and Punta Cana. “We have a better shot working with carriers outside the US such as Aer Lingus than domestic ones like Delta and United who already have American hubs, but it takes money.”

He noted that Missouri budgeted \$5 million to lure trans-Atlantic flights to St. Louis and/or Kansas City, the largest airports in the country (we’re #7) with no such destinations. British Airways brought service to Cincinnati thanks to \$700,000 in airport marketing support plus \$10 million in revenue guarantees from JobsOhio. Providence packaged \$3 million in waivers and another \$3 million in tax credits. San Antonio secured \$2 million in corporate funding through its CVB to attract Condor service from Frankfurt.



Around the table this day were reps from every local county and city (including airport hosts Norfolk and Virginia Beach) as well as the General Assembly. As it stands, our legislature has pledged \$825,000 in a new Governor’s Airline Incentive Fund, but Perryman said local

governments, businesses, development agencies and the Norfolk Airport Authority will need to pony up too and keep the money in their budgets going forward. What we can do as consumers is not drive to Dulles to catch a foreign flight. Start your journey here, says Perryman. “Otherwise it weakens our figures and argument for local service.”

In anticipation of more traffic to Portugal or Peru, Norfolk International is constructing an international arrivals facility, set to open in January, and Skytrax just rated our airport the fourth best domestic one in the world, behind a pair in Japan and one in China, mainly because of ORF’s “efficient passenger movement and processing system.” And this was before our long dormant moving walkways reopened last month. Keep up the good work Mark.



Three of a Kind: Our GA Caucus is Well Led and Brings Home the Bacon from Richmond

By Joel Rubin, Managing Editor

Anne Ferrell Tata and I share something of a bond.

She is the daughter in law of the late Bob Tata, who was my delegate from the Kempsville area of VA Beach for three decades (1984-2014). Bob, called affectionately “Coach” because of his long career at Norview High in Norfolk where his football teams won 101 games over twelve seasons, was, like me, a Wahoo (who helped my then 13-year-old daughter, a future UVA’er, become a page). Admired by all, his son Bob, Jr., a Naval Academy and UVA law school alum, married Anne Ferrell with whom they have four children. Since January 2022, she’s been the GOP delegate from the northeastern portion of Virginia Beach (99th District).

Maybe more importantly for our region, she is the vice-chair of the Hampton Roads legislative caucus along with the chair Cliff Hayes (D-Chesapeake, 91st District), both chosen for that responsibility by Sen. Louise Lucas (D-18th District). She’s the most senior member of the body (33 sessions and counting), as well as its President Pro Tempore and chair of its powerful Finance Committee.

“I picked Anne Ferrell,” says Louise, “because she’s smart, friendly, an outstanding representative and provides diversity.” Lucas could have chosen a more senior legislator or even a Democrat to work with Hayes, in the House since 2016, previously a member of Chesapeake City Council and in his day job, a tech guru (CIO of the City of Portsmouth).

The caucus includes Senators and Delegates from the 17 localities that make up the Hampton Roads MSA (about 30 members total). Anne Ferrell wasn’t looking to lead it when Sen. Lucas called, but she had prepared for the opportunity. “I was urged to get to

know the people on the other side,” says the Florida State grad (Media Studies). “At first, I was a bit hesitant to approach Senator Lucas, but I was told, ‘don’t be afraid of her. Go talk to her.’ And I must admit, she’s been an effective leader for our region.”

It helps that Tata has moved up fast in the House with a seat on the pivotal Appropriations Committee, along with Hayes, an NSU grad as is Lucas. “Yes, there are issues where Democrats and Republicans are not on the same page,” says Cliff, “and sometimes make very pointed speeches against the other side.” Both he and Anne Ferrell admit a lot of that is “theater,” to satisfy party stalwarts back home. To show how honored she is to be co-chair, Tata was happy to drive the furthest for our lunch at the popular “Pancakes and Things” on Indian River Road in Chesapeake, a Cliff Hayes’ hangout. “This place is great,” said Tata when owner Alex Angelos brought us a heaping Greek Salad.



**Sen. Louise Lucas, Del. Cliff Hayes,
Del. Anne Ferrell Tata**

When the caucus convenes, every Thursday at 7:30am during the GA sessions and occasionally other times of the year, all three say the red and blue hats come off. “When we meet, it’s all about the region,” says Senator Lucas. And the results have been striking. Among them have been the regional fiber ring, offshore wind development, military infrastructure, first responder support and transportation funding (like for the expanding HRBT). “It really helped the feds understand our needs better when we started speaking as one voice and prioritizing projects,” says Lucas, a one-time shipyard pipe fitter who in 1984 became the first African American woman to serve on Portsmouth City Council.

What’s ahead? “We’re all concerned about the impact the Trump budget cuts are having on federal employees, mostly in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads,”

“Three of a Kind”, continued on Page 8



James Spore



William Donaldson

Point Counterpoint: Should We Consolidate Our Local Governments into Many Fewer (or One)?

In a *Virginian-Pilot/Daily Press* op ed this past April 12, William (Willy) Donaldson, Ph.D., a respected assistant professor of finance and management at Christopher Newport University with an MBA from W&M, stated what a lot of people around here have long thought: we have too many local governments.

Here's a Willy quote:

"Eighteen. That's how many separate cities, counties and towns officially make up the Hampton Roads Metropolitan Statistical Area: 18 independent governments, each with its own mayor, city council, school board, police department, fire service, administrative structures, etc. This fragmentation leads to duplication of services, inconsistent policies, wasted resources, and a region that too often operates at cross-purposes rather than as a unified whole. In a region competing on a national and global scale, this is not just inefficient — it's self-defeating."

Donaldson called for "a consolidated regional government to centralize planning, secure federal funding more effectively, streamline public services and coordinate education policy."

We figured Jim Spore, the retired "dean" of city managers (24 years with VA Beach) and then President/CEO of Reinvent Hampton Roads for the next six, might have some thoughts on this.

Here they are:

"There are two myths at play here. One is that our problems could be resolved if we'd just consolidate and start acting as a unified region. The second is that these 18 units of local government (which is actually less than in many other regions) don't cooperate with each other. Worse yet, they compete.

I agree there might be some benefits to consolidation, but Dr. Donaldson's belief that it hasn't happened because of a lack of 'political will' is mistaken. The fact is, even if consensus could be reached, it would take too long and require the expenditure of too much political capital for the promised results.

As a result, an amazing coalition between business leadership and key members of the General Assembly has developed. They concluded that the long-term strategic answer to regional "under performance" was to focus on creating higher paying jobs in "traded sector" businesses, those that export products and services beyond local jurisdictions. This led to the creation of the innovative GO VA Program (Growth and Opportunity). The answer, we concluded, was 'Collaboration not Consolidation'.

In Hampton Roads, we have excelled in regionalizing (without consolidating cities) important systems and services like sewage treatment, public transit, economic development supported by the regional ED directors (RED Team), solid waste and, of course, major transportation projects. We now have a President's Council composed of leaders of many public and private organizations. The connections achieved have been truly transformational, far surpassing what could be achieved through consolidation."

We offered Willy Donaldson the last word. Clearly a Forward Thinker in his own right, here's how he responded.

My contention is that the task of managing the region would be far easier with fewer municipalities. I think Jim has propagated his own myth in stating that the existing entities do not really compete. The state-imposed Dillon Rule mandates that they compete. Indeed it severely constrains the latitude the municipalities have in sharing resources. The Dillon Rule was created in 1868 by Iowa Judge John F. Dillon. Maybe it's time to revisit?

Jim is correct that there is a lot of great regional cooperation going on, and he has been at the vanguard of those efforts. But would it not be easier with only a few municipalities, or one? Another truism of systems thinking (my expertise) is that in reality, there are no "boundaries" in the real world, only ones of thought, political, and social making. So the only constraint is the political will to change our reality. Not easy, not quick, and not without angst and drama, but perhaps a better future?"

The conversation continues.

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nice house in Smithfield with a bevy of Navy contracts keeping his workforce happy.

Tiziana Garner left Tallwood High in VB and then earned a bachelor's at ODU before joining the Coast Guard for a decade to see more of the nation. But the scent of the sea and our maritime industry lured her back. Now she's ensconced in Dominion Energy's Command center in Norfolk, monitoring the comings and goings of ships and people around the utility's offshore wind project. And she's in ODU's new maritime and supply chain program, a second masters and a career in her chosen field within her grasp, "I love it here, never leaving."

I am not Pollyannish about what brings people to the Tidewater or drives them off. It can be work or love or the desire to be away from or near family. It happens in every community and to many of those we educate at Tallwood, Maury, Kecoughtan, Lakeland or Norfolk State. The 757 isn't for everyone. Our economists and demographers study "out- migration" but frankly, it's up to each one of us to show others what we have to offer by making full use of our amenities and talking up our virtues. Yes, we don't get Taylor Swift, but many other acts of distinction make it to the region. We are not DC, or NY or Denver, but truth be told, some of their bedraggled denizens look longingly at our water and attractions and wonder if life is better at the end of I-64.

Bosnian refugee Marco Friegelj found his home here. Smart and undaunted, he started a technology solutions firm, then bought a building near the Downtown Tunnel where he now shares space with over 200 other startups, and he has similar hubs in Newport News and Hampton. They're called Incu-Hubs. Marco's not yet Nusbaum, Harvey Lindsay or Drucker & Falk, but watch out.

The future of a region is in its talent, not necessarily its nameplates. I'm interested, both for It's WINDSday and Forward Thinking, in sharing the stories of our next generations of Coastal Virginia movers and someday shakers.
forwardthinking@futureofhamptonroads.com is how to reach me.

“Three of a Kind”, cont. from Page 6

says Hayes. "We have two committees holding hearings across the state, and our caucus is very involved."

When its members gather, it's a must attend for "lobbyists" but also mayors and agency heads. Previous agendas reveal outside presentations about housing, workforce development, aerospace, economic development, energy, higher education, transit and more. "We are well educated," says Senator Lucas. And the rest of the state, with whom Hampton Roads competes, envies our unity, asserts this trio. "We are developing great relationships across party lines, and it's paying off for our region," says Anne Ferrell Tata. The "Coach" would be proud.

Clean Energy, cont. from page 5

the Virginia Port Authority's vastly upgraded Portsmouth Marine Terminal, we can all see the scope of the effort from high rises in Norfolk or driving along the Western Freeway in Portsmouth.

Dominion is erecting a command center at Norfolk's Fairwinds Landing where many of the vessels serving CVOW lease pier space. Our wind farm, and the cable plant, are remarkable undertakings, from engineering and environmental to communications and logistical perspectives. They are fostering new jobs, attracting international vendors and suppliers, and generating contracts for existing ones.

Offshore wind though is just one source of clean energy that we are pursuing. Advanced nuclear power is on our horizon, thanks to an ecosystem that features the Jefferson Lab research facility in Newport News, the Navy and Huntington Ingalls whose employees are known worldwide for their nuclear acumen, and a host of state agencies and consortiums with whom we are collaborating that likewise understand that energy security and national security, our bread and butter here, are closely linked.

A major green hydrogen production plant, perhaps one of the nation's biggest, may be in our future. We also work with our localities on siting solar farms and are always attuned to what's next in emerging technologies. You should know that Virginia's and Hampton Roads' focus on energy is the envy of other states and regions. We understand that providing the power for our homes, schools and businesses is not only essential to the economic well-being of the region, but it is an industry that due to our strategic location along the Atlantic, our increasingly skilled workforce, educational institutions and maritime culture, we are uniquely positioned to host.