

Police investigate double homicide in Hampton



King William broadband expansion now set to finish in February



Youngkin removes Hampton Democrat Mamie Locke from regional education board



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## BUSINESS

# Inside Business reveals Power List 2023 and Top 20

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Inside Business Power List 2023 Top 20.

Inside Business creates its annual Power List to showcase who's who in terms of moving the needle for the economy in Hampton Roads, whether they be the decision-makers, the influencers or those working behind the scenes.

This year, we organized the Top 20 by types of influence or power rather than a numerical ranking. We then listed [another 60 power players](#) from various backgrounds and sectors. In researching movers and shakers, we looked at last year's list and then looked at the newsmakers of the past year. We tried to take into account what has been on the top of most readers' minds.

We understand not everyone making a difference for our region is on this list, and we are open to learning more about who truly wields the power in Hampton Roads. Please email your suggestions to [tbozick@dailypress.com](mailto:tbozick@dailypress.com) or [inside.business@insidebiz.com](mailto:inside.business@insidebiz.com).

- [Read more about the selection process in the editor's note.](#)
- [View the Power List's 60 power players.](#)
- [View the Emeritus List of longtime power brokers and community shapers.](#)

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## The power of development

### Bruce L. Thompson

Virginia Beach developer Bruce Thompson, CEO of Gold Key | PHR Hotels, achieved a huge milestone this year. After more than nine years, he and his team completed The Cavalier Resort, a \$435 million public-private partnership, with the opening of the Embassy Suites by Hilton.

The three-hotel resort includes the restored Historic Cavalier Hotel and Beach Club and the Marriott Virginia Beach Oceanfront, offering 547 hotel rooms, nine restaurants, event spaces, a spa and a on-site distillery. Thompson and other investors helped save the 1927 landmark Cavalier Hotel from demolition, spending five years and \$80 million renovating the once-dilapidated hotel, which reopened with 85 rooms in 2018.



Bruce Thompson (Courtesy photo)

“Successfully completing large-scale projects in Virginia Beach requires developers who are willing to invest millions of their own money and guarantee that they’ll do what they say they’re going to do,” Thompson said.

Since its founding in 1986, Gold Key | PHR said it has developed 54 private projects, including two partnership developments with the city of Virginia Beach, valued at over \$1.2 billion. Thompson’s hospitality management company employs more than 2,400 people.

Thompson’s projects have elevated the Oceanfront over the past 20 years, including the Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront and the 31 Ocean mixed-used development. He also recently completed a 42 Ocean condominium development next to the Cavalier and was the developer of The Main, a 300-room Hilton hotel and restaurant spot in downtown Norfolk.

Thompson, the 2012 Virginia Beach First Citizen, has been part of regional leadership, including as part of the Hampton Roads Executive Roundtable and the regional GO Virginia board. He’s an ardent supporter of the

travel industry, serving as a director of the American Resort Development Association and on the board of many tourism and development organizations. He's also co-chaired five governor's inaugural celebrations.

In civic service, he's raised more than \$20 million for ALS research and secured funding for a fully wheelchair-accessible beach park and playground at the Oceanfront. In December 2020, Thompson co-founded JT's Angel Fund in memory and in honor of his son, Josh, to provide financial assistance to ALS patients who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. He is also a member of the Hampton Roads chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Foundation.

Thompson received the 2009 ARDA Ace Philanthropic Award, the 2009 Outstanding Community Visionary Award from Amerigroup Foundation, the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities' Humanitarian Award and Volunteer Hampton Roads' Lenora B. Matthews Lifetime Achievement Award. He was named a King Neptune, presiding over the 37th annual festival, and Virginia Business' 2021 Virginia Business Person of the Year.

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## **John R. Lawson II**

John R. Lawson II, executive chairman of W.M. Jordan Co. in Newport News, continues to play an active role in the region's transformative developments.

"It's fun to be a part of helping to increase the quality of life in the community that you were born in and live in," Lawson said about Hampton Roads.

His two sons are returning to the area for work after college, and he's glad to grow the region to retain the next generation of talent. "You need to leave everything better than you found it," he said.

Lawson's construction management company is helping to execute the vision for the Atlantic Park surf park mixed-use development at the former Dome site in Virginia Beach. He's personally invested, like other developers on the project, because he believes in its success. Lawson has helped Thompson transform the north end and central area of the beach with the Hilton and Cavalier projects, and now, he believes Atlantic Park can have a revitalization effect for the south end, particularly with a year-round tourist attraction and jobs.

Lawson helped raise money for Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters' new pediatric mental health hospital in Norfolk and W.M. Jordan managed its construction. The company is also working on the veterans' health care clinic on Chesapeake Regional's campus, which will serve as a satellite for the Department of Veterans Affairs' Hampton medical center. The company is also a joint venture partner for the construction of the Headwaters Resort & Casino in Norfolk.



John R. Lawson II (Courtesy image)



On the Peninsula, W.M. Jordan broke ground earlier this year on Newport News Shipbuilding's new submarine facility, and it's finishing the second building in the Newport News Tech Center Research Park that will house a green hydrogen demonstration lab as part of a larger effort to kick-start the industry in the region. Lawson, a former Virginia Tech board of visitors rector, is the developer of the research park managed by Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center.

Lawson is involved in the Hampton Roads Executive Roundtable and is on the board of CHKD, The Mariners' Museum and Park, TowneBank and Christopher Newport University.

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## The power of celebrity

### Pharrell Williams

Pharrell Williams, the Virginia Beach native and pop culture multihyphenate, had another busy year, bringing a successful music festival back to his hometown and advancing several development projects around Hampton Roads.

After cancellations due to the coronavirus pandemic and a year away in Washington, D.C., Williams brought his Something in the Water music festival back to the Virginia Beach Oceanfront in late April. Even though rain delayed Friday acts and washed out Sunday performances, tens of thousands of attendees packed the beach for performers such as Diddy, Busta Rhymes, the Jonas Brothers and Lil Wayne.

Williams also scored a major development victory in March when Atlantic Park, a \$335 million mixed-used development and public/private partnership, closed after years of negotiations. Williams' public backing of the surf park as a partner helped keep the project on the table. The development at the old Dome site at the Oceanfront will feature a lagoon with machine-generated waves, a live entertainment venue, restaurants, retail, offices, residential and more.

Williams hosted The Mighty Dream Forum, a three-day business conference, in downtown Norfolk in November and drew attention to Hampton Roads with its entrepreneurial platform aimed at shining a national spotlight on inclusion and innovation. The conference attracted national civic and corporate leaders, venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, artists, educators and other innovators to the city.

Finally, Williams and other stakeholders continue to hold negotiations with Norfolk to redevelop the former Military Circle mall into an arena, housing, retail and offices.



Pharrell Williams (Billy Schuerman/The Virginian-Pilot)



## **The power of the deal**

### **Donna MacMillan-Whitaker**

As founder and managing partner at Venture Realty Group, Donna MacMillan-Whitaker was part of the team that helped assemble the \$335 million Atlantic Park development project in Virginia Beach, which will transform the former Dome site into a surf park, live entertainment venue, restaurants, retail and more.

Atlantic Park supports Virginia Beach as a year-round destination for tourism and so has the potential to fuel economic growth, in addition to adding another attraction that supports local quality of life. Pharrell Williams is a development partner, and MacMillan-Whitaker had also worked with the 13-time Grammy winner's team in organizing the first Something in the Water festival.



Donna MacMillan-Whitaker (Courtesy of [venturerealtygroup.com](http://venturerealtygroup.com))

“After a lengthy, complicated and unorthodox process that included various COVID-related shutdowns and historic post-pandemic inflation, we are honored to finally get started on bringing Atlantic Park to life,” MacMillan-Whitaker announced in March. “This project hits close to home for our entire Virginia Beach-based team, and we’re immensely proud to move our vision forward.”

In addition to Venture, Williams and the Virginia Beach Development Authority, other development partners are Newport News-based W.M. Jordan Co., Bishard Development and Priority Title/H2O Investments, the firm said.

The development is fulfilling a decadeslong vision to capitalize on the Dome site, which became vacant in 1994. Venture Realty Group first responded to the request for proposals in March 2017, working with three city managers, multiple City Council representatives and countless community stakeholders before the deal terms were approved in December 2019, according to the firm’s announcement.

MacMillan-Whitaker has worked in the real estate industry since 1985, and has represented national retailers in Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C., according to the Venture website.

As the firm’s licensed principal broker, she focuses on site acquisition, site design and predevelopment responsibilities. She also assists other brokers with anchor tenant negotiations and marketing.

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### **Mike Culpepper**

Working to help close the \$335 million Atlantic Park development project in Virginia Beach, Venture Realty Group Managing Partner Mike Culpepper worked with city stakeholders to finalize the largest public-private

partnership in the city's history in March.

Culpepper works as the in-house attorney for Venture, according to its website. At the firm, he coordinates deal formation, land use entitlement and predevelopment services.

The deal took nearly six years of planning and negotiating with multiple funding sources coming together, including the sale of Virginia Small Business Financing Authority and Atlantic Park Community Development Authority bonds and the city funding more than a third of the project, or more than \$125 million. The Atlantic Park Community Development Authority is the first CDA in Virginia Beach and provides the mechanism to allow for future generated tax revenues to finance project infrastructure.



Mike Culpepper (Courtesy of venturerealtygroup.com)

Private construction financing was provided by a group of lenders led by Fulton Bank, including Old Point National Bank and Dollar Bank, according to the project's news release. Additional supporting construction lending was provided by TowneBank. Venture Waves LLC, supported by a team of local investors and community leaders, provided equity.

Before his time at Venture, Culpepper worked at Williams Mullen. He graduated from William & Mary and the University of Richmond School of Law.

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## **The power of mental health**

### **Amy Sampson**

Amy Sampson, who becomes president and CEO of Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters health system in June, has been a driving force in CHKD's development of its 14-story Children's Pavilion that changed the Norfolk skyline.

The Children's Pavilion opened last year with inpatient psychiatric beds where children suffering from anxiety, depression, eating disorders and a host of other mental health challenges can find compassionate care close to home.



Amy Sampson (Courtesy photo)

Her early recognition of an unprecedented crisis in the mental health of children led to the launch of CHKD's mental health initiative years before the declaration of a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health. Sampson was personally determined to bring the right people together to answer a need that could not be ignored, assembling a team of world-class clinicians and researchers to transform children's mental health services in Hampton Roads and beyond.

And to fund the mental health initiative, she spearheaded a campaign that has raised more than \$70 million toward a goal of \$75 million to meet the ever-escalating mental health crisis facing our youth.

The expansion of mental health services is the latest in a long list of achievements during her 33 years at CHKD, which also include leadership in marketing and communications, government relations, strategic planning and business development, patient experience and community outreach efforts.

Sampson's dedication to CHKD's mission of "Health, Healing and Hope for All Children" drives her work in addressing the full range of children's health care needs as she takes the helm of Virginia's only free-standing children's hospital.

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## **The power of the port**

### **Stephen Edwards**

Stephen Edwards, CEO and executive director of the Virginia Port Authority, continues to lead the Port of Virginia to record growth in cargo handling and is getting the word out about the Virginia Model for operations.

In the 2022 fiscal year, the port moved a record-breaking equivalent capacity of almost 3.7 million 20-foot-long containers, an almost 15% increase from the previous fiscal year.

The port authority is ensuring it stays at the forefront of change, spending \$1.4 billion to deepen port channels to at least 55 feet, modernize the north berth at Norfolk International Terminals and increase its rail capacity by more than 35%.

Edwards is positioning the port to capture green supply-chain demand from suppliers and customers. The authority is on track to have 100% of its electricity come from clean energy by 2024. Currently, around 69% of the port's electricity consumption comes from clean energy.

The port is a major regional and statewide economic development tool and is often cited as a reason why companies expand to Hampton Roads. It's been a major draw for burgeoning regional offshore wind industry. As part of his role at the port, he serves as an ex officio board member of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership.



Stephen Edwards (HANDOUT)



Edwards' duties include running Virginia International Gateway, Newport News Marine Terminal, Norfolk International Terminals, Portsmouth Marine Terminal, Richmond Marine Terminal and the Virginia Inland Port. He is an ex officio member of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership board of directors.

Edwards brought nearly three decades of experience in the shipping industry when he took the reins of the port authority in January 2021.

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## **The power of persistence**

### **Sen. Louis Lucas**

State Sen. Louise Lucas' longtime dream of a local casino came to fruition when Rivers Casino Portsmouth opened in January.

The \$340 million casino is expected to generate \$16 million in annual tax revenue for the city.

As president pro tempore of the Virginia Senate, Lucas again symbolized the chamber's Democratic advantage, giving them the ability to stop the agenda favored by Gov. Glenn Youngkin and Virginia Republicans, including a 15-week abortion ban. She also continues to be a force on Twitter, where her tweets celebrating April 20 or debuting new campaign ads regularly receive hundreds and sometimes thousands of likes.



Sen. Louise Lucas (Jay Paul/The Virginian-Pilot)

And now, she is on another mission to maintain Hampton Roads' legislative clout.

The longtime senator since 1992 from Portsmouth said she is fighting to keep her seat so she can become the next potential chair of the Virginia Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee after what she said is a move by Northern Virginia party leaders to support primary opponent Sen. Lionell Spruill, D-Chesapeake.

Because of her seniority, she explained, Lucas is in line to head the finance committee, a powerful body that helps craft Virginia's budget and other matters related to state taxes and expenditures. The move would give a Hampton Roads lawmaker power in a committee currently co-chaired by two Northern Virginia Democrats.

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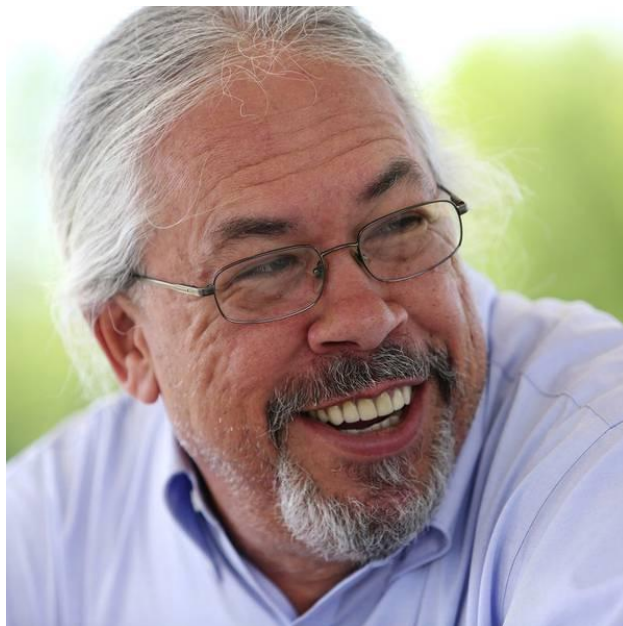
### **Robert Gray**

As chief of the Pamunkey Indian Tribe since 2015, Robert Gray has led the tribe toward achieving economic prosperity.





It was only in January 2016 that the tribe, whose reservation is located in King William County, received federal recognition. Two years later, Gray and the tribe completed a search for a casino location, announcing a deal to purchase about 14 acres of land between Harbor Park and the Norfolk Amtrak station. When Virginia legalized casino gaming in 2020, the tribe opted to pursue a state license, and voters approved a referendum in 2020 allowing casino gaming on the property next to the Tides stadium.



Robert Gray (Steve Earley )

With plans underway to build and operate a temporary gaming facility on that site while the permanent casino is being constructed, visitors can expect to enjoy casino games by early next year. In the meantime, the tribe has been a strong community partner in Norfolk supporting 10 food pantries with more than \$500,000 in donations and has developed a partnership with their neighbor, the Norfolk Tides.

Gray has said in the past that he hopes the casino will help the tribe become more self-sufficient. “Our young people need educational and job opportunities, and our older tribe members need better access to health care and housing,” Gray told The Virginian-Pilot in 2018.

The \$500 million casino is expected to have a 500-room hotel, several restaurants, a spa and other resort amenities. Norfolk officials say the casino could bring in between \$33 million and \$44 million in city tax revenue annually.

Gray is also a 35-year Air Force veteran and served on Pamunkey Indian Tribal Council for more than 25 years. The Tribe also recently received a \$500,000 federal grant to expand high-speed internet access on its land, which will improve access to remote education, telemedicine and business opportunities.

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## **The power of strategic regional leadership**

### **Nancy L. Grden**

Nancy L. Grden is president and CEO of the Hampton Roads Executive Roundtable, a group of CEOs from the region’s largest employers and community leaders seeking to expand the region’s economy, create more and higher paying jobs and leverage entrepreneurship and innovation. The roundtable is the region’s management organization for the statewide GO Virginia economic development program.

Grden previously worked as associate vice president for Old Dominion University’s Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship. In that capacity, she led two major economic development initiatives to advance the region’s maritime innovation ecosystem by serving as the inaugural executive director for the Hampton Roads Maritime Collaborative for Growth & Innovation and as co-convener for the ODU Maritime Initiative

Leadership Group, which developed a strategy and plan for ODU's Maritime Initiative and School of Supply Chain, Logistics, and Maritime Operations.

An executive, entrepreneur and change agent, Grden founded/co-founded companies such as Medicaid/Medicare services company Amerigroup (acquired by Anthem/Elevance), biotech company Genomind, behavioral health care company Lifescape and fractional CEO services company Avenir. She has served in C-suite strategic planning, development and marketing roles with predecessor banks to Bank of America, as well as major health care companies, including ValueOptions, now part of Anthem/Elevance. She has public sector and government relations experience with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and National Conference of State Legislatures.



Nancy L. Grden (Courtesy photo)

She is the inaugural chair of 757 Collab for the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem and immediate past chair of 757 Angels. She serves on the executive committees and boards for StartWheel, Women in Venture, Norfolk Innovation Corridor, The Norfolk Forum, Hampton Roads Chamber, Hampton Roads Alliance and RVA757 Connects. She is a board member for Envision Lead Grow, a national not-for-profit that breaks the cycle of poverty for girls from underserved communities through entrepreneurship, and where she received the first Trailblazer Award in 2018. She was a 2021 Inside Business Women in Business honoree and on Virginia Business' "Virginia 500: The 2022 Power List."

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## **Dennis Matheis**

In September, Dennis Matheis became president and CEO of Sentara Health, leading 30,000 employees and introducing a recent rebranding. He is also co-chair of the Hampton Roads Executive Roundtable, a group of seasoned executives and community leaders who will set the agenda for regional economic development.

Matheis, who has spent 27 years in senior leadership roles within health care, previously worked as executive vice president for the health system and led Sentara Health Plans. During that time, he led the largest health plan acquisition in Sentara's history, resulting in more than 400,000 new health plan members and nearly 1,300 employees joining the organization. The insurance division now serves more than 1.2 million members in Virginia and Florida. He had also established a Sentara Health Plans Diversity and Inclusion Council.

Before joining Sentara, he spent 13 years in leadership roles at Anthem Inc. with a background as a certified public accountant before entering the health care industry. Gov. Glenn Youngkin recently appointed him to

his Advisory Council on Revenue Estimates. He is on the board and executive committee of America's Health Insurance Plans and is a member of the National Provider Network Task Force.

Sentara is one of the top 20 largest not-for-profit integrated health systems in the country with 12 hospitals. Sentara recently invested \$4 million to launch two programs to support students pursuing health care careers in response to medical staff shortages across the country. The health system is also providing loan financing support for the Marshall-Ridley Choice Neighborhood revitalization in Newport News.



Dennis Matheis (Courtesy photo)

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### **Cliff Fleet**

Cliff Fleet, president and CEO of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, is heavily involved in regional leadership as co-chair of the Hampton Roads Executive Roundtable.

The Virginia native is also the foundation's Colin G. and Nancy N. Campbell distinguished presidential chair. A corporate executive, teacher, community volunteer, board member and consultant, he has enjoyed a broad and deep career with leadership roles across a variety of disciplines and organizational sizes. Notably, he has earned four academic degrees from the College of William & Mary, including graduate degrees in history, business administration and law.

Fleet teaches at William & Mary, is chair of the William & Mary Foundation and is a board member of the Omohundro Institute and the Virginia Business Higher Education Council. Previously, he led the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation as president and worked as president and CEO of several companies.



Cliff Fleet (Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

Under Fleet's leadership, Colonial Williamsburg recently broke ground on a new archaeology center to be completed in 2025. The center is one of the foundation's signature projects leading up to the commemoration of America's 250th anniversary in 2026. Colonial Williamsburg recently convened stakeholders in multistate



planning efforts for the anniversary. The foundation is also restoring and interpreting one of the nation's earliest Black Baptist churches and moved the Bray School, likely the oldest surviving building in the United States dedicated to the education of Black children, from William & Mary to the historic area.

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## **Doug Smith**

The Hampton Roads Alliance, aimed at attracting major employers and high-paying jobs to the region, capped off the best three years of supported jobs and capital investment announcements in nearly two decades under the leadership of President and CEO Doug Smith.

Under Smith's tenure, the alliance has played a major role in establishing Hampton Roads as a key hub in the offshore wind industry. Notably, Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy is investing \$200 million to develop the first U.S. offshore wind blade facility at Portsmouth Marine Terminal. The Miller Group and developers are investing more than \$100 million to transform the Lambert's Point Docks into Fairwinds Landing, a hub supporting the offshore wind, shipbuilding and maritime logistics industries.

Now, the alliance is driving the development of a Regional Energy Roadmap that lays out how the region can control its energy future, balancing reliability and access with affordability and economic growth. It is also working with Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center and locality partners to create a green hydrogen fuel program to help kick-start a local industry with a planned demonstration site at Tech Center Research Park in Newport News.

Smith and his peers at the other regional organizations are working to make Hampton Roads the most collaborative region in the commonwealth. The alliance recently tapped a Virginia Beach firm to create a digital platform that will enable localities and regional economic development professionals to share data and business intelligence to better work together. The alliance is funded by Hampton Roads localities and private sector investors.

In addition to serving as an ex officio on regional boards such as the Hampton Roads and Virginia Peninsula chambers, the Hampton Roads Workforce Council and the Hampton Roads Executive Roundtable, Smith serves as a volunteer board member of the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore and The Hague School in Norfolk.

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Doug Smith (Courtesy of Amanda MacDiarmid/Stellar Exposures)



## **The power of shaping downtown**

### **Kenny Alexander**

Kenny Alexander, who has been Norfolk's mayor since 2016, continues to promote several development projects and tourism initiatives in the city.

His administration took a hard-line stance against downtown gun violence in 2022, resulting in the shutdown of multiple nightclubs, and increased downtown police patrols and installed several mobile surveillance cameras. His administration also hired a new police chief, former Hampton police chief Mark Talbot, after previous chief Larry Boone abruptly retired in 2022.

The city's first Black mayor also oversaw an expansion of low-cost airline options at Norfolk International Airport and year-round sailing by Carnival Cruise Line, which will debut in 2025.

Amid the pandemic in 2020, he launched the Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity to examine affordable housing, economic opportunity, health/food security and youth/education. The City Council approved measures to make way for the continued redevelopment of former public housing complex Tidewater Gardens into mixed-income community Kindred in the St. Paul's area near downtown.

Prior to serving as mayor, Alexander was a state senator and delegate in the Virginia General Assembly. He also became chancellor of Centura College in 2021.

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### **Mary B. Miller**

Mary Miller, president and CEO of the Downtown Norfolk Council since 2013, has helped downtown businesses navigate various challenges over the past few years, from the coronavirus pandemic to helping guide a way to a safer nightlife scene.

Under her leadership, the council is working with Safe Night Inc. to implement a voluntary accreditation model for downtown businesses meant to strengthen the relationships between city regulators and police. The approach to work proactively to prevent crime came after the city took a hard-line reactive response to downtown shootings last year.

The problem-solving comes after the council offered grants to help restaurants set up outdoor "streatery" dining during the pandemic.



Kenny Alexander (Courtesy photo)



During her tenure, Miller has led the organization through the launch of Neon, Norfolk's first arts district, and the award-winning Vibrant Spaces program and Selden Market retail incubator. Her advocacy efforts with the DNC board secured funding for infrastructure programs in the Neon District, implementation of new technology for the parking system and numerous updates to the city's zoning ordinance. In partnership with the Greater Norfolk Corp., the council launched LiveNFK, a summer program for college interns to highlight the positives of living and working in Norfolk.

She knows the city well, having started her career with the Norfolk Planning Department in 1985 before pursuing other jobs and eventually returning as a senior city planner and being promoted to housing services planning manager. She left in 2004 to work for Downtown Norfolk Council as vice president.



Mary Miller (Courtesy photo)

Miller is a member of the International Downtown Association and Urban Land Institute. She is a past board member of IDA, a founding board member of the Norfolk Preservation Collective and currently serves on the boards of VisitNorfolk, the Norfolk Innovation Corridor and the Hampton Roads chapter of the Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association.

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## **The power of manufacturing**

### **Jennifer Boykin**

President Jennifer Boykin leads Newport News Shipbuilding, a \$4 billion company and major regional employer of more than 25,000 workers. She became the first woman to lead the Newport News shipyard in 2017.

The 137-year-old shipyard is the largest industrial employer in Virginia, responsible for designing, building and maintaining nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered submarines for the Navy.

The company recently christened Massachusetts, the 25th Virginia-class submarine and the 12th to be delivered by the shipyard. Newport News is one of only two shipyards capable of designing and building nuclear-powered submarines for the Navy. Earlier this year, the company broke ground on a new production facility to support the construction and delivery of Columbia-class and Virginia-class submarines.

Boykin is committed to workforce development and is a strong advocate for science, technology, engineering and math programs. She is a founding member of Old Dominion University's Women's Initiative Network and



First 10 Forward, which are both aimed at empowering girls and women. The number of women working in the yard has climbed 7% in the past decade, now representing 18% of the company's workforce.

She serves on a number of community boards, including as board chair of The Mariners' Museum and Park and on the board of RVA757 Connects.

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## **The power of affordable housing**

### **Steven E. Lawson**

A third-generation builder, Steve E. Lawson is chairman of The Lawson Cos., a real estate firm specializing in the development, construction and management of multifamily and single-family homes in Virginia. In 2022, the company celebrated 50 years of building and operating affordable and market-rate housing.

As chairman, Lawson oversees a team managing roughly 4,800 apartment units and \$50 million in annual construction and development. The company has built or renovated 34 apartment communities throughout Virginia. It has also constructed and sold more than 800 single-family homes and townhomes representing over \$130 million in sales.

Lawson has advocated for many years in support of equitable and affordable housing, serving on the board of the nonprofit HousingForward Virginia and on the Rental Advisory Council of Virginia Housing, the statewide housing finance agency.

For more than two decades, he has promoted strong national affordable housing policy through numerous multifamily leadership positions with the National Association of Home Builders. He has provided expert testimony to Congress on three



Jennifer Boykin (Courtesy photo)



Steve Lawson (Courtesy photo)



occasions and briefed the last three chairs of the Federal Reserve concerning ongoing challenges the industry faces.

Earlier this year, the Urban League of Hampton Roads recognized Steve Lawson with a Martin Luther King Community Leaders Award for his long-standing contributions to affordable housing in the region.

In 2019, he received a Human Rights Award from the Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission for his work building truly inclusive housing in the resort area. This community, Seaside Harbor, not only provides much needed affordable housing but also serves clients with developmental disabilities and mobility impairments. Seaside Harbor was later featured in a Department of Housing and Urban Development case study demonstrating innovation in affordable housing.

Among many other accolades, communities built by Lawson won the prestigious National Association of Homebuilders Pillars of the Industry award in both 2019 and 2021. Lawson was also recognized in 2022 by the General Assembly with House Resolution No. 790 commending the company on achievements associated with the creation and advocacy of affordable housing in Virginia.

Additionally, Lawson is ranked as a top workplace and is No. 43 on Affordable Housing Finance's nationwide list of "Top 50 Affordable Housing Developers."

The company also partners with numerous nonprofit organizations, including Samaritan House, Hope House Foundation and Volunteers of America.

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## **Taylor Franklin**

Taylor Franklin, CEO and co-founder of The Franklin Johnston Group in Virginia Beach, recognizes that the growth of Hampton Roads is reliant upon its ability to attract and retain employers — and that requires a high quality, affordable housing stock for their employees.

Over the course of his career, Franklin has been a part of the development of over 5,000 affordable housing units, with the development of over 1,200 affordable units in Hampton Roads since 2013. In support of this growth, The Franklin Johnston Group has recently completed Riverside Station and is under construction on Origin Circle at Kindred and Reunion Senior Living at Kindred, both of which serve the city of Norfolk's redevelopment of St. Paul's.



Taylor Franklin (Courtesy photo)

Additionally, in support of Virginia Beach’s continued growth in the Central Business District corridor, Franklin and the TFJG team have developed Renaissance and 200 West Apartments, and Elevate 17 is under construction.

The Virginia Beach resident serves on the boards of the Virginia Beach Economic Development Authority, Chesapeake Bay Wine Classic Foundation, Virginia Wesleyan University, Norfolk Collegiate School and the Virginia Beach Neptune Festival. Franklin and his family have given much of their time and finances to nonprofits, including ACCESS College Foundation, United Way of South Hampton Roads, Virginia Beach SPCA, Operation Smile and Junior Achievement of Hampton Roads.

This year, The Franklin Johnston Group is celebrating 10 years and the creation of 10 communities across Hampton Roads that provide residents with first-rate affordable housing. Under Franklin’s leadership, the company has grown to employ more than 700 people with 25,000 apartment homes under management across the East Coast.

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### **Janet V. Green**

Janet V. Green has served as the CEO of Habitat for Humanity Peninsula and Greater Williamsburg for more than 21 years. The local affiliate of the international nonprofit received massive attention in 2021 as it constructed the first-in-the-nation Habitat 3D-printed home.

The Habitat construction crew printed the 1,200-square-foot home in 28 hours — reducing the standard construction schedule by at least four weeks. National leaders commended Green and Habitat on their vision, noting the importance of building more affordable housing. The Peninsula and Greater Williamsburg Habitat is also building four homes using insulating concrete forms. These molds hold freshly poured concrete in place during construction and remain in place permanently to provide additional insulation for the concrete walls. The material is cost- and energy-efficient while disaster resistant, and so is an affordable alternative to traditional lumber framing.

Green also leads the Habitat ReStores in Newport News and Williamsburg, noted as the most successful ReStores in the commonwealth, and ranked in the top 20 of about 1,000 ReStores nationwide. A third ReStore opened in York County earlier in May.



Janet V. Green (Rob Ostermaier/Courtesy of Consociate Media)



The local Habitat has helped more than 215 families with building and buying homes, using the nonprofit's competitive, affordable no-interest monthly mortgage. Green helped many of these homeowners navigate the financial challenges of the pandemic and helped them safely remain in their homes and weather economic and health challenges. The nonprofit also runs a robust exterior repair program, repairing over 450 homes, comprising thousands of repairs and using almost all volunteer labor.

Green continues to serve as a highly regarded, well-respected leader in affordable housing, including serving on the boards of the James City County Workforce Housing Task Force, Dominion Energy Eastern Region Advisory Committee and Coastal Virginia Builders Association and serving for six years on Habitat for Humanity International's U.S. Council. Green is a sought-after speaker to groups large and small on the need for more affordable housing. She is married to retired Norfolk Chief Juvenile & Domestic Court Judge William P. Williams.

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## The power of philanthropy

### Dennis M. Ellmer



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Ocean View native Dennis Ellmer grew two small Chesapeake dealerships into Priority Automotive, a \$2 billion family of 20 dealerships across Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia that employs more than 2,500 people. But selling cars hasn't been his only priority.

From the company's earliest days, the Priority Automotive president and CEO has made it his mission to give back to the community, and he encourages his employees to do the same. Over the past 12 years, Priority has helped raise more than \$4 million for local children's charities through its annual events. This includes \$250,000 for Children's Hospital of The King's Daughter's pediatric mental health hospital last year. In 2021, Ellmer helped fund the Priority Toyota Cancer Center at Chesapeake Regional Medical Center, bringing state-of-the-art oncology care to the people of Chesapeake and surrounding area.



Dennis M. Ellmer



Priority is also a primary sponsor of the Old Dominion Athletic Foundation, where Ellmer and his wife last year donated \$2.5 million to renovate Old Dominion University's baseball stadium. Each year, Priority helps local SPCAs find homes for hundreds of shelter pets through its popular Home For The Holidays program.

In 2019, Ellmer received recognition from Toyota President Akio Toyoda for Priority's inmate training program, which gives nonviolent felons in Norfolk City Jail a second chance in life by becoming certified automotive technicians. Toyota's Best in Town award is given to just one U.S. dealership a year.

Under Ellmer's leadership, Priority recently established Priority Automotive Charities as the company's formal charitable fundraising entity. Through Priority Automotive Charities, the company continues the tradition of the Charity Bowl, which now includes a partnership with the ODU men's football team to help raise awareness for the growing program.

Ellmer has earned countless accolades throughout the years, including being named to the Hampton Roads Business Hall of Fame and as Norfolk's First Citizen in 2019. He has also received the Martin Luther King Leadership Award, the Norfolk Sports Club President's Award, the Steve Guback Distinguished Virginian Award, Northwood University's Dealer Education Award, the Toyota Financial Ambassador Award and the Chesapeake Sports Club 2013 Sportsman of the Year award.

A proud graduate of Norview High School, Ellmer is very much a son of Hampton Roads. He and his wife, Jan, have been married for more than 40 years and have three children and two grandchildren.



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