

<http://www2.timesdispatch.com/news/oped/2011/oct/19/tdopin02-horne-civic-engagement-spurs-citizen-lead-ar-1392191/>

Richmond Times-Dispatch

Published: October 19, 2011

[Home](#) / [news](#) / [opinion](#) /

Horne: Civic engagement spurs citizen leadership

By SUSAN HORNE

As community leaders, we find ourselves balancing the demands of the different roles we play in our lives — businessperson, employee, coach, volunteer and family member. These roles and this balance force us to develop leadership skills in all of these roles. What we need to consider is how we choose to use those skills to address civic issues in our communities and across the Commonwealth.

Unfortunately, civic issues that beckon action, collaboration and communal discussion often go by the wayside until someone steps up to lead the charge. The good news is that these issues can be addressed with statewide engagement and the intangible, invaluable asset of collaboration.

In my role with LEAD VIRGINIA, I have found that working together across the business, nonprofit and government sectors creates an environment ripe with potential. Historically, we've called this social capital; today, we think of it as networking 2.0. In networking 2.0, diverse thinkers with varying perspectives have the ability to affect our community and statewide issues, and ultimately to shape our future.

One of LEAD VIRGINIA's alumni recently noted the significance of thinking outside his own life and day-to-day activities to consider other points of view, statewide needs and the potential there is for improvements around the commonwealth. What struck me about this was that across Virginia, there are a number of striking examples of local partnerships that exemplify our ability as business and community leaders to work together in seeking big-picture initiatives with regional and statewide impact.

In our area, the Virginia Logistics Research Center (VLRC) has positioned itself as the mid-Atlantic hub for logistics excellence and has capitalized on factors facilitating conditions for economic growth through manufacturing, transportation, warehousing and distribution. Comprising Crater Planning District Commission, Virginia's Gateway Region Economic Development Organization and Emporia-Greenville Industrial Development Corporation, the group in its early work has demonstrated transformational opportunity in Fort Lee and the Richmond-Petersburg area.

Another example of such a partnership is Lynchburg's Region 2000 Partnership. The partnership was established 10 years ago when the Center for Advanced Engineering and Research; Local Government

Council; Economic Development Council; Workforce Investment Board; Young Professionals of Central Virginia; and Technology Council joined together with the common goal of providing leadership development throughout the 2,000-square-mile area surrounding Lynchburg. The group envisioned becoming a thought-leader and catalyst for public policy, infrastructure and education and most importantly, a facilitator for innovation. In the past several years, it has succeeded in doing just that.

With a team fueling its area economic strategy and resources to move Region 2000 forward, this partnership has become a model of successful collaboration by achieving measurable results with new business startups, and measurable advances in restructuring its industrial portfolio to have greater emphasis on professional and technical services. The partnership's work led to a Forbes best places for business and careers ranking of 28 among 200 of the largest U.S. metro areas, and to international recognition from peer organizations as being on the leading edge in current economic development practices.

An example of cross-pollination between higher education, business and the state is the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute (VTC) of Roanoke, Va. VTC is a joint venture between Virginia Tech, Carilion Health System and the Commonwealth of Virginia, formed in 2007 to establish an innovative medical school and interdisciplinary research institute.

The Research Institute now implements groundbreaking research and houses the center for a worldwide hyper-scanning network for interactive brain functioning. In its short lifespan, the institute has attracted a highly talented team, been awarded National Institutes of Health grants, and is among the 5 percent of U.S. medical schools that require a professionally executed and publishable research project as part of its key curriculum. VTC has undoubtedly brought game-changing potential to Virginia and the Roanoke and New River Valley region.

Making a difference in our communities and the commonwealth is about taking action, understanding challenges, connecting with others and sparking a movement around an issue. That this is one of the most effective ways positive impact can be achieved cannot be underestimated.

As a nonprofit leader, family member and president and CEO of LEAD VIRGINIA, I share many of the responsibilities of others in my community. But it is the obligation of all of us in leadership positions to work together to identify issues and pursue resolutions. By leveraging our networks, understanding where we fit in the process and what we can bring to the table, we have the capacity through our collective knowledge and actions on statewide issues to create lasting change. I challenge each of us to rise to the occasion.

Richmond Times-Dispatch © Copyright 2011 Media General Communications Holdings, LLC. A Media General company.