



May, 2010

Since 1919 Dedicated to Responsible Citizenship and the Improvement of Local Government

B U L L E T I N



Next Meeting

**12 noon – Wednesday
May 5, 2010**

**The Colony Club is located at
10 East Franklin Street**

There is free parking in the rear or on the street. Directions — Approach headed East (one way street) on Franklin Street; left on Foushee; right into the Colony Club lot off of Foushee (this right turn is into an alleyway that runs parallel mid-block between Franklin and Grace Streets). Colony Club spaces are marked & are on the perimeter of lot. Proceed into Colony Club entrance —green awning leads into courtyard; proceed up courtyard to double glass doors.

Lunch is \$16 for members and \$18 for nonmembers.

You must make your reservation by calling (545-6656) or email info@richmondfirstclub.org



Laura Lafayette

Housing: Challenging Times Laura Lafayette to Suggest What Can Make A Difference

Laura Lafayette has been breaking new ground ever since she graduated from the College of William and Mary.

As the senior vice president of the Richmond Association of Realtors and CEO of this organization that services more than 5,000 Realtors and their affiliate members, Lafayette has tackled a big job at what is probably the most challenging time the organization has ever faced.

And that is what Lafayette will speak about at the May 5th meeting of Richmond First Club. In “The State of Housing in the Richmond Region—Present and Future Challenges.” She will discuss the present housing situation, the foreclosure picture, the question of if housing is affordable, and if so, where and how do we keep housing affordable. In addition, she will address what lies ahead and strategies that might help housing challenges.

Just out of college, she was press secretary for Governor Douglas Wilder’s historic and successful run for Governor. She then became his press secretary after he was elected Governor.

Administration of Partnership for Workforce Homes, a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that an adequate supply of workforce housing, is among her responsibilities.

The Partnership joined with Richmond First Club, the League of Women Voters and Leadership Metro Richmond last fall to sponsor the only forum held for all the candidates for the House of Delegates in challenged races.

Work in and knowledge of state government is a strong suit for Lafayette who is known as well for her writing skills honed in her Wilder years.

Lafayette is active in the community and serves on the board of the Alliance for Quality Growth, Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity, the Mayor’s Regional Cooperation Commission and the Mayor’s Interagency Task Force.

At William and Mary, she received a BA in religion. She and her husband, Michael, an attorney, live in Henrico County. The Lafayettes have three children.

Submitted by Nancy Finch

Reminder: To help us coordinate our planning with the Colony Club dining staff—

***Please RSVP for the monthly meeting
in a timely manner!***

Pat Ryan — 545-6656 — or email: info@richmondfirstclub.org

— Reflections —

— *If you missed the April 2010 meeting —*
Here is what our speaker had to say!

**Pleading Poverty Doesn't Work:
 Numbers Show City Inequities**

"We can't say 'We're poor.' That doesn't work," said Kelly Harris-Braxton, executive director for Virginia First Cities.

What *does* work, is hard information, charts, numbers that demonstrate the funding plight of cities, she said.

Harris, speaking at the April meeting of Richmond First Club, described why Virginia cities came together in 1999 to form a "loose coalition" of cities to seek more success at the Virginia General Assembly.

Virginia First Cities is able to narrow the focus to larger cities with unique problems unlike the Virginia Municipal League that represents all cities. She highly praised VML, however.

Locked into their boundaries by the moratorium on annexation, Virginia cities have more costs than counties, Harris said. "Our (state) policies encourage suburban sprawl. That forces the cities to a higher tax rate."

Harris-Braxton ticked off some of cities' unique problems.

- Tax exempt property. Fifty percent of the property in Portsmouth is tax exempt. In Richmond, about 25 to 30 percent of the property is tax exempt.. Tax exempt property is generally government owned property.
- Cities contain brownfields, old buildings, old industrial properties, once productive, but now part of blight.
- Poverty rate in Richmond is 20 percent, three times higher than Chesterfield County.
- Free lunch measure in Richmond, 75 percent; Chesterfield 20 percent.
- Localities are being funded at 2006 rates forcing local governments to pick up the losses with their only source—real estate taxes.
- Road maintenance funding must be paid by cities while counties rely on the state.

In the recent General Assembly when war broke out over the Local Composite Index, the complicated formula that determines school funding for local governments, Virginia First Cities played a significant role. VML had to back off because the proposals of Governors Tim Kaine and Bob McDonnell affected cities differently with competing results for local governments. However, VFC "did one thing that was pivotal." VFC created a chart that showed the impact of the proposed LCI changes on member city governments. Legislators were shocked, Harris-Braxton said when they saw how the proposals would affect their constituents.

The "education" of legislators resulted in compromises that were more fair than either Governor's original proposals, she said.

Keeping watch on legislation and its outcome for city governments has been effective, she said. "Policies often don't make a lot of sense. We were able to save \$7 million for the City of Richmond." A House Appropriations proposal would have eliminated 'at risk' funds based on free lunch numbers that are "a big benefit for us." VFC warned about the impact of the proposal and it was abandoned.

The present economic situation could have some positive outcome, Harris-Braxton said. But strategy is needed to seek positive results. "It would make sense to regionalize. It would save money," she said.

"Sometimes, necessity makes things change." That could happen, she said, "based on localities that are willing to work together."

Kelly Harris-Braxton previously was director of the Office of Intergovernmental Relations and Assistant City Attorney for the City of Richmond. She is a graduate of the University of Virginia and William and Mary's Marshall-Wythe School of Law. She is the mother of two sons and is married to George Braxton, former Richmond School Board chairman.



State of the Richmond First Club – 2009-2010

The Richmond First Club, under the able and energetic leadership of a very hard working Board of Directors, has had a busy year focusing on problems of the City. The Club has presented excellent speakers on important issues, and it has taken action to influence public policy and generate discussion of public issues.

The Club joined with the League of Women Voters, the Partnership for Housing Affordability, Leadership Metro Richmond and WCVE Public Radio to provide a public forum for candidates in contested elections for the House of Delegates. The forum provided an opportunity for the candidates to focus on some of the problems facing the Richmond region before an audience of citizens in the WCVE Studio. The live broadcast by WCVE brought the debate on these issues to citizens throughout the metropolitan area.

The Club supported a discussion of the way the Richmond Region is growing by sponsoring the Partnership for Smarter Growth's River City Saunter. The Saunter last October presented a bus tour of the tremendous amount of vacant land that is available for redevelopment. If this land could be redeveloped instead of destroying new green field lands, it would improve our communities by reducing costs of services.

The Club's initial focus for its speakers was on redistricting. The Rev. Doug Smith of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy spoke on the need to change the current practice where sitting legislators are so successful in using computers to select the voters they will represent that incumbents in many districts have no opposition. Former Republican Delegate Terrie Suit gave the legislative viewpoint at a later meeting. She said redistricting was inherently political, but that Governor-elect McDonnell had promised bipartisan citizen involvement through legislation or appointing a Blue Ribbon Committee. The Club wrote Governor McDonnell urging him to exert leadership in the legislative debate over bipartisan redistricting, but without success.

Later speakers addressed various issues. Bernie Niemeier, publisher of Virginia Business, and Dr. Mike Brooks, VCU urban planning professor emeritus, spoke on the problems caused by the one term limit for Virginia Governors and Dillon Rule limitations on local government. Financial problems affecting local governments were discussed by Michael Cassidy, executive director of The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, and then at a later meeting by Jim Campbell of the Virginia Association of Counties, Mike Amyx of the Virginia Municipal League, and their consultant James Regimbal, a former staff member of the Senate Finance Committee. Kelly Harris-Braxton of the Virginia First Cities Coalition spoke of the unintended effects of some general legislation on Virginia's cities and the Coalition's success in getting legislators to understand these problems. Ray Owens and Jonathon Martin of the Richmond Federal Reserve Bank provided a discussion of efforts to recover from the recent financial crisis and the progress of the economy is overcoming the recession.

Suzette Denslow, Mayor Dwight Jones' Chief of Staff, spoke on the Mayor's efforts to build good relations with Commonwealth leaders, and with the leaders of neighboring jurisdictions. She also pointed out an unfortunate placing of articles and headlines in the Richmond Times Dispatch that focused on a crime in Richmond while underplaying in the same edition a recent report on a great improvement in Richmond's level of crime compared with other cities. The Club brought this to the attention of Thomas Silvestri, Publisher of the Richmond Times Dispatch. He reviewed the matter with his editors and explained their approach to crime statistics. The result of this exchange is that the Times Dispatch is alert to the necessity of making sure that positive news is given equal billing with negative news.

State of the club—Continued on page 3 . . .

*If you would like to refer to earlier issues of the
 "BULLETIN" — please visit our website —
 you will find them there!*

www.richmondfirstclub.org

STATE OF THE CLUB *from page 2*

The Club now has 42 members. Several changes have been made to modernize operations. A major accomplishment was the updating and redesign of the Club's webpage. Publication of the Bulletin is now done electronically. The site of the monthly meetings was moved to the Colony Club at 10 East Franklin Street, where there is free parking. The budget for the year projected a small deficit because of the need to redo the web page. Expenses and income for the year are on budget or slightly better.

*Frederick S. Fisher, President
April 17, 2010*



The Partnership for Smarter Growth

Our partner organization (Partnership for Smarter Growth (PSG) is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating and engaging communities in the Richmond Region to work together to guide where and how we grow. PSG serves the City of Richmond, the town of Ashland, and the counties of Charles city, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent, and Powhatan.

Partnering with a network of individuals, organizations, businesses, planners, and elected officials, PSG's 2009 accomplishments included

- hosting 150 citizens and elected officials for the *River City Saunter* bus tour exploring suburban revitalization opportunities;
- organized support for Richmond's Downtown Master Plan;-led outreach to promote the James River Rail-to-Trail project to connect homes, shopping, and schools;
- hosted Citizen education Workshops on planning for smarter growth;

- worked with Envision Henrico for Comprehensive Plan amendments to preserve Varina's rural character;
 - worked with citizen groups in Powhatan and Hanover to foster good community planning;
 - brought together Goochland citizens to celebrate conservation and rural heritage at Tuckahoe Plantation;
- convened regional leaders of non-profits and businesses to form the Land Use and Transportation Work Group as an advisory council.
PSG's 2010 program will highlight the economic benefits of smarter growth.

In 2009 Sheila Sheppard, PSG's regional coordinator and a Richmond First Club member, was recognized by *Style* magazine for her leadership in a non-profit organization ("Top Forty Under Forty"). She and PSG's *River City Saunter* received top story coverage on NBC 12 and Richmond Magazine.



Call for Nominations

The Richmond First Club Nominations Committee has been and will be talking with members and recruiting new leadership for the August 1 2010 — July 31 2011 fiscal year. Elections will take place on June 2, 2010 at the annual election luncheon meeting of the membership.

If you want to suggest an individual to serve, please first obtain that individual's permission — then contact committee chair Brenda Finley 804.272.9004 brenden.associates1@juno.com; Louis Matherne 804.213.4205 lmatherne@vablood.org; or Anne Sterling 804.285.8354 nimbleleap@aol.com.

Application for Richmond First Club Membership (or use this form for your annual renewal if already a member)

I am familiar with and will subscribe to the purposes of the Richmond First Club. I understand that members are expected to participate actively on a club committee and are encouraged to attend the club meetings as often as possible. I certify that I am a registered voter in the Richmond metropolitan area; and by signing this application, and upon being accepted for membership by the Board, I agree to fulfill the membership obligations set forth above.

Name: _____ (Name or Nickname used) _____

Home Address: _____

Business Address: _____

Name of Business: _____ (Position or Title) _____

Home Phone: _____ Business Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____ Preferred mailing address (please check one): Home Business

Signature of Applicant _____ Date: _____ Enclosed \$ _____

Annual Membership Dues \$85 (plus paying separately for each of 10 monthly luncheons attended.) — OR select the "Gold Star" membership with dues of \$210 annually (\$210 includes the fee for 10 monthly luncheon meetings as well as your dues). — If you attend all meetings you realize a savings of at least \$35 per year and don't need to remember to bring a check each month for your lunch! Look for the members with a gold star on their badge — they took advantage of the "Gold Star" membership benefit!

Please mail to Richmond First Club — PO Box 344 — Richmond, VA 23218-0344.

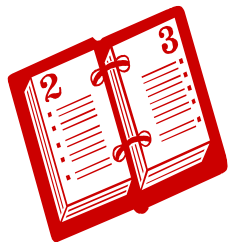


2009-2010 Board of Directors

President: Fred Fisher 804-786-1929 fsfisher@aol.com
1st VP: Nancy Finch 804-272-6188 nancyfin@comcast.net
Secretary: Jonathan Macdonald 804-272-1442 jbmacdon@hotmail.com
Treasurer: Louis Matherne 804-213-4205 lmatherne@vablood.org
Bulletin Director: Brenda Finley 804-272-9004, brenden.associates1@juno.com
At Large: Rayford Harris 804-321-7944, vsuteach@verizon.net
At Large: Len Morrow 804-358-7355 lmorrow3@verizon.net
Membership Director: Pat Ryan 804-545-6656, patryan@kw.com

Website Committee: Nancy Finch, Brenda Finley, Mike Brooks

The public is welcome to attend membership meetings, which are generally held on the first Wednesday of each month. Please call or email Pat Ryan to make a reservation — 804-545-6656, info@richmondfirstclub.org.



Mark your calendar now
for the remaining monthly
luncheon meetings of the
Richmond First Club's
2009-2010

- May 5, 2010 Luncheon Meeting
- June 2, 2010 Luncheon Meeting
- June 6, 2010 — Spring Fling at Westover Plantation

The Club meets on the first Wednesday of the month. Members are welcome to attend the monthly meetings of the Board of Directors — usually held on the Monday afternoon following the Wednesday membership luncheon meeting.

If you plan to come, you will be provided with an opportunity to offer your ideas, concerns, and/or other areas of interest. You may be looking for a way to become more involved in the club, or head up a committee. Please call or send an e-mail message to the President (above) for directions and to be included on the agenda.

Richmond First Club

Our Mission

The club's founders shared a common vision of a permanent organization that would inform the public and political leaders about a broad range of civic issues, policies and solutions.

The spirit of enlightened activism that initially inspired the formation of the Richmond First Club in 1919 carries on today in its active study of and involvement in issues currently affecting the Richmond metropolitan area.

During its 80-plus year history, the club has provided leadership on a number of issues critical to the quality of governance in the metropolitan areas. All the region's citizens have benefited from the club's energy and diligence.

The club pioneered the idea of cooperation among the political jurisdictions in the metropolitan areas. The club completed comprehensive studies advocating regional cooperation as early as 1981.

The lifeblood of the club is its committee structure, where members focus on and research civic issues vital to continued development in the region. Thorough and nonpartisan studies have been published by these committees, assisting in many high-profile accomplishments over the years.