

## Rural Innovation Forum Offers Insight & Options

### Department's Prospect Activity—March:

- Responded to **821** requests for general information
- Conducted **4** business visits and **1** tour
- Distributed **129** marketing packages, **98** business guides, **120** maps, and **68** growth summaries
- Assisted **11** new business start-ups
- Worked with **4** new and **37** on-going prospects
- Submitted **1** proposal
- Received **44,530** hits on [www.loudoun.gov](http://www.loudoun.gov), with **10,347** user sessions
- Received **33,728** hits on [www.loudounfarms.org](http://www.loudounfarms.org), with **2,059** user sessions

From adapting traditional farms and creating value-added products, to using specialty plants to remove toxins from polluted soil and studying gene expression as it relates to the racing potential in thoroughbreds, the Department of Economic Development's Forum for Rural Innovation provided a comprehensive overview of all that is invigorating 21<sup>st</sup> century agriculture.



The forum drew nearly 200 participants.

The March 18<sup>th</sup> conference in Winchester was the creation of the Department of Economic Development's Lou Nichols, Warren Howell, Gary Hornbaker, and Ann Higgins, but was a cooperative effort of the Offices of Agricultural Economic Development and Cooperative Extension in Clarke, Fauquier, Frederick and Loudoun Counties, Virginia and Jefferson County, West Virginia, and the Potomac Headwaters Resource Conservation & Development Office.

Attended by close to 200 farmers, government officials, and agricultural entrepreneurs, the conference featured speakers with expertise in agricultural research and successful farmers who have adapted to changing times and markets.

Bill Dickinson, the newly appointed Virginia Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, began the event by noting that Virginia's farms are at a critical point in their evolution -- with little funding from state agriculture programs, and with an aging base of farmers, 70% of the farmland will pass to the next generation within 15 years. This next generation, Dickenson explained, will make the decision whether to give into "severe development pressure" or to continue farming.



Rural exhibits were also on display.

Dickenson advocated several practices to help farmers meet the challenges of achieving and maintaining profits, including increasing agricultural production for niche markets on small specialized farms, developing value-added agricultural products, and emphasizing agritourism.

Other speakers throughout the day provided living examples of just how these innovative ideas are being carried out.

Loudoun County's Chip Planck, of Wheatland Vegetable Farm, emphasized the consumer focus on niche products by stating that "if you can provide high quality products unavailable [at the store], such as good, soft tomatoes, consumer demand will not be a problem. As long as it's different in some way, people will buy it." Planck emphasized that the product is not the challenge for the farmers that he knows, instead it is matching farmers

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## Announcements and Expansions

### New & Existing Business



- ◆ **MAP ROI Systems** ([www.maproi.com](http://www.maproi.com)), the Sterling-based developer of G-Force, a system for identifying, proposing, and managing federal, state, and local government contracts and grants, announced March 16 that it had acquired Privia, Inc.

The move was made to allow the company and its customers greater access to the Dulles Toll Road, the Beltway, and Dulles Airport.

The 10-year-old company is a leading provider of high level, network focused solutions, including servers, visual surveillance systems, and more than 100,000 other technologies solutions for emergency responder communications. The company's clients include the Metropolitan Washington Police Department, for whom it designed digital video and network infrastructure for their Joint Operations Command Center.



- ◆ **SMI Group** ([www.smigroup.com](http://www.smigroup.com)) has moved its corporate headquarters from Chantilly to 16,528 square feet of space at Northpointe Business Park in Dulles.

- ◆ **The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority** ([www.mwaa.com](http://www.mwaa.com)) has purchased 830 acres adjacent to Dulles Airport for future expansion. 407 acres will be set aside for the construction of a proposed fourth runway to be completed as early as 2008, and the remaining property will be held for unspecified future expansion projects.



The proposed locations of new runways at Dulles Airport.

- ◆ **J. Morris Flowers** ([www.jmorrisflowers.com](http://www.jmorrisflowers.com)) recently occupied a prime location in Downtown Leesburg at One Loudoun Street, SW. Owned by Jennifer Morris, the shop is holding its grand opening Friday, April 1 beginning at 5:30pm. A ribbon cutting will occur with the Town of Leesburg, and light refreshments will be served from 6 to 8pm. Entertainment will be provided by the Loudoun Symphony. The event is open to the public and coincides with Leesburg's First Friday April event.

"I had such a wonderful time choosing gifts for the shop that complement my flower selections," said Morris. "Flowers need never be ordinary. I certainly will provide flowers that are elegant and whimsical along with traditional flowers that have such special meaning in our culture."

Morris has worked as a bridal florist for several years, combining her passion for flowers and her advanced floral degrees to create custom bouquets that reflect the personalities of her clients. In addition to bridal services, the J. Morris Flowers shop offers everyday bouquets, unique gifts, and potted plants.



## In the News

- ◆ In *Popular Science Magazine's* March article "Technopolis Found," the Washington, D.C. area was ranked as the 3rd Top City for Technology in the U.S. The study ranked a combination of factors, including use of technology among citizens, the number of high tech jobs per capita, transportation innovation like mass transit and alternative fueling stations, the use of technology in education, the smart use of energy, and health field statistics such as the number of clinical trials in the city and the use of global positioning satellite by emergency medical personnel.
- ◆ Gaithersburg-based Buchanan Partners announced in the *Washington Business Journal* in March that it has added an additional 90 acres to its 300-acre Arcola Center planned development. According to the *Journal*, the new land will provide additional frontage onto Route 50 where up to one million square feet of retail and office space will be developed. In addition, Arcola Center will include 500,000 square feet of flex/industrial space and, if a rezoning is approved, hundreds of homes. The company expects to begin the project in early 2006.



Buchanan Partners was named the 17th largest commercial developer in the region by the *Washington Business Journal* in January.

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with available land, and finding and managing good workers.

DED's Gary Hornbaker stressed that large scale commodity farming should be replaced with a focus on marketing value-added products to homeowners over the bulk sale of raw materials. "If it's local and natural, it will sell," said Hornbaker, stressing that the hottest products now include local and natural meats, eggs, pigs for barbeque events, wildlife feed, horse related services, home and landscape decorations, agritourism, and related recreation events.

Opportunities for fruit production on small plots of land were also featured at the event. Speaker Tony Wolf, viticulture extension specialist at Virginia Tech, stressed that new bedding and greenhouse techniques for berry production, combined with berry-based agritourism and value-added products, can yield significant profits of several thousand dollars per acre.

Several of the speakers acknowledged that uncertain farming futures had led them to develop innovative ways to retain their farms. Farmer Cam Tabb accomplished this by developing services that catered to the residential market — by collecting tree stumps and wood scrap from home building sites for a fee — which he then turned into valuable products and sold back to the community. "It's a mindset," explained Tabb, "The trick is to stay hard-headed enough to stay the course."

Other conference topics focused on scientific advances that are opening new doors for agricultural research and business opportunities. Keynote speaker G. Terry Sharrer, Curator of Health Sciences at the Smithsonian, discussed advances in gene sequencing and gene expression, and Michael Blaylock of Edenspace discussed his company's use of plants to remove soil toxins.

"The forum was a success because it brought together people with a positive attitude toward farming in the future," said Lou Nichols. "Loudoun is a rural innovator because the rural economy here is supported through economic development, technical production assistance and sound land use policy."



Chip Planck, left, provided suggestions for improving farmers markets, such as developing a sliding-scale fee system for vendors.



Gary Hornbaker, left, stressed that farmers should "know their niche," and understand market pricing.



Keynote speaker G. Terry Sharrer discussed the study of genes in race-horses, like the legendary Secretariat, above right.



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**Department and Commission News**

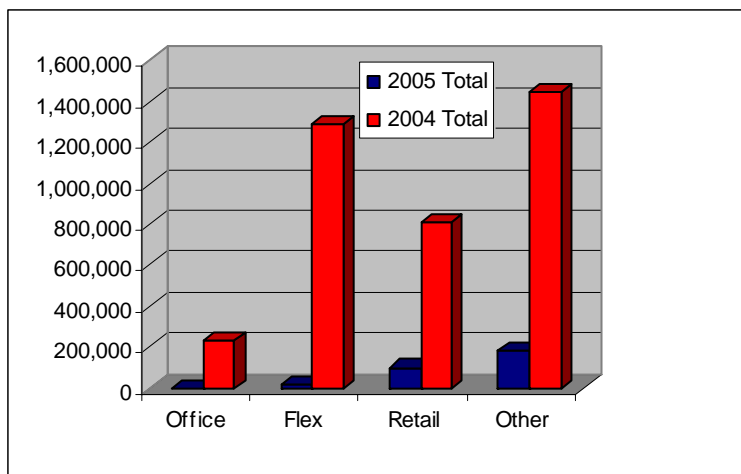
- ◆ The Department of Economic Development (DED) was a table sponsor at the annual Loudoun Convention & Visitors Association annual meeting in March.
- ◆ Ann Higgins was presented a Certificate of Appreciation from the Loudoun Valley Homegrown Markets Association March 15th. The certificate was given in recognition of all of Ann’s work on behalf of the markets, including registering vendors, creating a farmers market brochure, keeping up the database of participants, and taking farmers market photographs for use in marketing materials.
- ◆ DED’s Robyn Bailey and John Merrithew from the Planning Department presented the Eastern Loudoun Tour to approximately 40 county staff on March 17th.
- ◆ DED and the Town of Leesburg economic development staff held a “meet and greet” at DED’s offices March 4th. The meeting was designed to introduce new staff members and discuss current county and town projects. Larry Rosenstrauch and Dorri Morin also participated in a “meet and greet” session with the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce on March 30.
- ◆ Cindy Richmond was a presenter at the American Planning Association’s National Planning Conference in San Francisco March 19-23.

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**Construction Activity**

In February 2005, Loudoun County permitted a total of 212,503 square feet (SF) of nonresidential construction. The combined value of new buildings (\$59,776,000) and alterations (\$3,123,148) is over \$59.7 million.

- ◆ Office — 0 SF in February and 0 SF in January
- ◆ Flex/Industrial — 12,060 SF in February and 0 SF in January
- ◆ Retail — 99,328 SF in February and 0 SF in January
- ◆ Other — 101,115 SF in February and 78,702 SF in January
- ◆ Taxable — 142,732 SF in February and 75,149 SF in January
- ◆ Route 28 — 0 SF in February and 73,646 SF in January



**Nonresidential Construction — Square Feet Permitted  
2005 Year-to-Date and 2004 Total**