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# The Catalyst

## *A Message from the President*

Today is Groundhog Day, a day built around looking ahead and hoping for an early spring. After the bitter cold that has settled over the Peninsula these past few weeks, I think we're all more than ready to turn the page. Thankfully, at the Virginia Peninsula Chamber, the new year is already off to a hot start.

We began 2026 with the opening retreat for [LEAD Higher](#), our advanced leadership development program in partnership with our



great friends at [Christopher Newport University](#). Thirty emerging leaders from across the Peninsula, representing many different professions and backgrounds, started their 12-month leadership journey together. They dove into the foundations of leadership while also getting to know themselves and one another better. [LEAD Higher](#) is a big part of what makes the Chamber the go-to organization in Hampton Roads for developing the business and community leaders who will shape our region's future.

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framework - **Defense, Energy, Aerospace, and Logistics.** These four industry clusters represent our strongest economic growth assets. Rather than chasing the next shiny object, DEAL is about doubling down on what we already do exceptionally well and building from there.

That approach also supports our larger goal of positioning the Peninsula as a nationally recognized innovation ecosystem, anchored by NASA, Jefferson Lab, our outstanding universities, and a significant military presence. One exciting step in that effort will be an innovation-focused visit to Huntsville, Alabama, where regional leaders have built a powerful innovation hub around many of the same strengths we have, especially in defense technology and aerospace.



Later this year, we'll once again host our State of the Military and State of the Federal Labs events, both closely aligned with the DEAL framework and our innovation focus. All taken together, these initiatives really capture the theme of the year ahead: building the future of the Peninsula economy by leaning into our strengths and working together with purpose.

Winter may not be done with us just yet, but the momentum is clear. This is a year of new ideas, new energy, and big opportunities, and the Chamber is excited to help lead the way.

Bob McKenna  
President/CEO,  
Virginia Peninsula Chamber



# LEGISLATIVE *update*



## 2026 General Assembly - Key Business Bills to Watch

*By Chris Davidson, Government Relations Consultant*

The General Assembly is moving quickly, and the Virginia Peninsula Chamber has flagged a slate of bills that could materially affect businesses across the Commonwealth. We are paying especially close attention to bills that touch the Hampton Roads business community as well as our 2026 priorities: protecting Virginia’s business climate, workforce development, infrastructure support, and innovation & technology.

[Click here to view our 2026 Legislative Agenda](#)

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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT *news*



## KONGSBERG Breaks Ground on Advanced Missile Facility in James City County

*By Bob McKenna,  
[Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)*

[Kongsberg Defense and Aerospace, Inc.](#) marked a major milestone for the region’s defense economy on January 16, 2026, with a groundbreaking ceremony for its first U.S.-based missile manufacturing and maintenance facility in James City County, Virginia.

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## Jefferson Lab

### DOE - Backed Jefferson Lab Renovation to Transform Facility into Science & Education Hub

*By Bob McKenna,  
[Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)*

A U.S. Department of Energy–backed renovation at [Jefferson Lab](#) will transform a facility previously owned by the [City of Newport News](#)—now transferred to [Jefferson Lab](#)—into a next-generation science and education hub, further positioning the Virginia Peninsula as a center for research, innovation, and talent development.

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## EASTERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL INDUSTRIAL FACILITY AUTHORITY

### EVRIFA: Regional Collaboration Powering Peninsula Economic Growth

*By Bob McKenna,  
[Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)*



### Virginia Peninsula Chamber hosted first Rising Tide event of

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([EVRIFA](#)) is a regional economic development partnership changing how localities across the Peninsula and Hampton Roads compete, by working together instead of separately. Created under Virginia's Regional Industrial Facilities Act and formally recognized in 2019, EVRIFA enables multiple cities and counties to share resources, risks, and rewards in large-scale industrial and site development projects. It is now managed by the [Hampton Roads Alliance](#).

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## Playbook"

By *Caroline Branch*,  
[Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)

On Tuesday, January 27, the [Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#) hosted its first Rising Tide event of 2026, focusing on "[The Hampton Roads Playbook](#)". The event brought together leaders from Defense, Energy, Aerospace, and Logistics to share knowledge and expertise.

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# BUSINESS *tips*

## What is Marketing?

By *Dr. James M. Womick*, [Certified SCORE Mentor](#)

Marketing is the process of understanding people and connecting what they need or want with products, services, or ideas that solve real problems. It goes far beyond advertising. Marketing begins with research—learning who the audience is, what matters to them, and how they make decisions. It includes product design, pricing, distribution, communication, and relationship-building. Effective marketing tells a clear story, builds trust, and delivers value over time. In today's digital world, marketing also involves data analysis, social media, and technology. At its core, marketing is about creating meaningful exchanges that benefit both organizations and the communities they serve.

***Congratulations to SCORE Williamsburg on being named the 2025 Virginia Chapter of the Year, recognizing your outstanding mentorship***

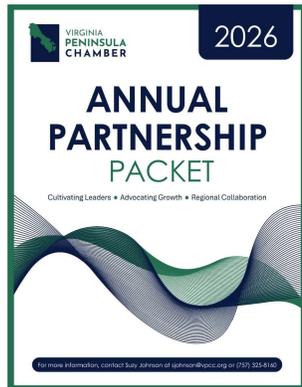
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# CHAMBER *news*



## Annual Partnership Now Available!

Promote your business while participating in the success of the Virginia Peninsula Chamber and the Peninsula business community! Annual Partnerships provide our members the opportunity to be recognized in a variety of ways.

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## New Website Live Now!

We're excited to announce the launch of our brand-new website! We look forward to rolling out new features and delivering a fresh, updated experience for our members and the Peninsula business community.

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# CHAMBER *recaps*



## LEAD Higher Retreat

By Jaime Parrish,  
[Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)

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## LEAD Peninsula Poverty Simulation

By Jaime Parrish,  
[Virginia Peninsula Chamber](#)

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# JANUARY *new members*



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# UPCOMING *events*



**Start, Grow, Thrive**  
*"Succeeding in Business Series"*

**February 4, 2026**

*Featuring Willy Donaldson, Ph.D.,  
Christopher Newport University*

**RSVP NOW** >



**February 10, 2026**

*Hosted by Grove Christian  
Outreach Center*

**RSVP NOW** >



**February 12, 2026**

*Featuring SKY4 TV*

**RSVP NOW** >



**February 17, 2026**

*Featuring Chris Davidson &  
Charlie O'Brien, LOGENTIQ*

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**February 26, 2026**

**Regional Internship Training**



**February 27, 2026**

*Honoring Kasia Grzelkowski,  
VersAbility Resources LLC*

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VIRGINIA PENINSULA CHAMBER'S 2025 ANNUAL PARTNERS



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