

A TALE OF TWO (LIVABLE) CITIES

Roanoke and Richmond are two of the 30 localities in the United States recognized recently for using progressive strategies to create outstanding livable communities for their residents. Although separated by more than 180 miles, the two cities have more in common than you might think.



Roanoke continues tradition of forging new paths

ROANOKE HAS ALWAYS been known for its pioneer spirit. From the early 1700s – when settlers first came to the area, to its years as a railroad center, to the 21st century – Roanoke has been a place where people explored possibilities.

It is this mindset that recently brought Roanoke a dose of national attention from Partners for Livable Communities – a non-profit leadership organization working to improve the livability of communities. In April 2004, the organization announced a list of 30 American cities and regions that promote quality of life, economic development and social equity in innovative ways. Roanoke was one of five small cities selected for recognition.

The Roanoke of today is still a pioneering community. Its focus, however, has shifted to forging new paths to revitalize downtown and neighborhoods, as well as to provide residents with access to quality education; to engage in regional cooperation; to draw technology businesses to the area; and to promote environmental stewardship.

This emphasis, however, has not overshadowed the city's continued appeal as a charming community nestled in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Its careful balance between the built and

natural environments – the dynamic energy of the city's emerging technologies combined with its stunning backwoods beauty and exceptional amenities – makes Roanoke an exciting and welcoming place.

"Livability is the product of effort and energy," said City Manager Darlene Burcham. "It is a process of change, the ability of communities to appreciate their assets, to see what

their challenges are and to pitch in – as communities – to find solutions. Roanoke is doing all this and more."

To spur redevelopment and improve quality of life in core neighborhoods, the city invested approximately \$1.3 million (or 65 percent) of its annual federal (CDBG) funds in the "Southeast ... By Design" pilot project to renovate neighborhoods in the southeast section of Roanoke. A second neighborhood revitalization is underway.

Roanoke's "livability" is also recognized through its ability to function as a historic town center. In addition to promoting its bustling Farmers' Market and downtown business district, city leaders have worked hard to preserve the history of downtown through public/private partnership projects where notable structures were renovated to bring new opportunities to citizens. Examples include:

- Hotel Roanoke (a renovated "railroad" hotel that dates back to the late 19th century) has become the region's premiere hotel and conference center. Since its renovation, the hotel has won numerous national awards for outstanding service and business operations. In addition, the hotel's restaurant was recognized with an "Award of Excellence" from *Wine*

Spectator and with the Distinguished Restaurant of North America (DiRoNa) "Award of Excellence" designation.

- The Jefferson Center (a former high school building) was skillfully renovated to house numerous arts and cultural agencies, as well as a performing arts auditorium.

- Roanoke Higher Education Center (former headquarters of the Norfolk and Western Railroad) houses 17 institutions of higher learning under one roof.

- Eight Jefferson Place (formerly Norfolk & Western Railway Co.'s general office building) offers

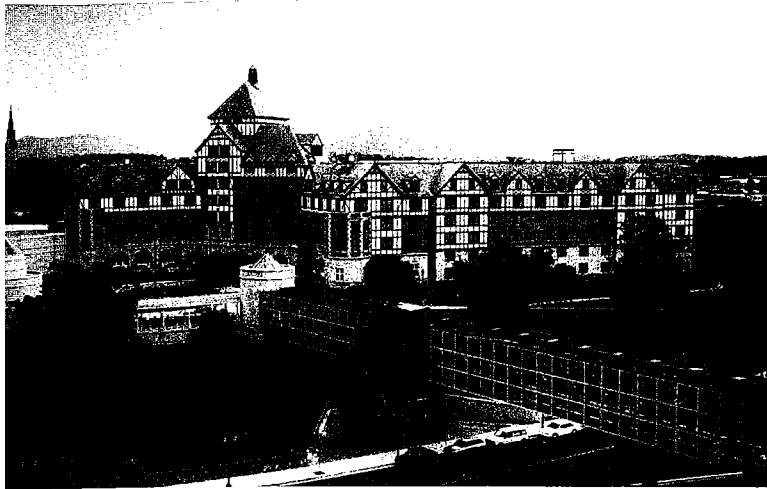
87 upscale apartment units for downtown living.

- The O. Winston Link Museum (the former Norfolk and Western Railway Passenger Station) is home to Roanoke's newest museum – a testament to the creative talents of O. Winston Link, who captured the images and sounds of Norfolk and Western's powerful steam engines in their final years from 1955 to 1960. It also houses the Roanoke Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau Headquarters.

The City of Roanoke has led regional efforts to address specific public service issues cooperatively, including the creation of the Roanoke Valley Resource Authority (comprised of three jurisdictions for the

Roanoke's success has been recognized in numerous ways. In addition to being honored as one of America's Most Livable Communities in 2004, it also holds the distinction as a five-time All-America City (1952, 1979, 1982, 1988, 1996); a Top Digital City (2001-2003); and as the Eleventh Best City in the United States in 2004 ("Cities Ranked and Rated").

By Melinda Mayo



The Hotel Roanoke is the region's premier hotel and conference center.

redevelop this section of the city and to connect it to the downtown, to create a biotechnology bedrock for the region with the hope of diversifying Roanoke's economy and providing jobs through the 21st century and beyond. Over the next 15 to 20 years,

one of the premier healthcare organizations in Virginia.

The city has blazed another trail with its emphasis on Web site technology. Last December, the Center for Digital Government selected Roanoke as a Top Digital City for 2003. Roanoke is the only municipality to rank first in their Digital Cities Survey three years straight. According to the survey, Roanoke – along with Tampa, Fla. and Fort Wayne, Ind. – are the most digital-savvy, cutting-edge cities in the nation. Roanoke won in the population category of 75,000-125,000. The award reflects the city's commitment to use information technology to improve the delivery of services to residents and to create a high-tech environment for local business establishments.

Other ways in which Roanoke has exhibited its leadership as a livable community include the following:

- **Public Safety.** Roanoke is one of only two jurisdictions in Virginia to be recognized as a Certified Crime

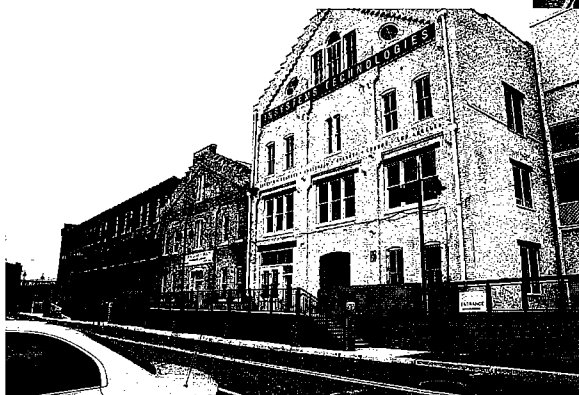
management and disposal of solid waste), the formation of a regional water and wastewater authority, and participation in a library consortium, a regional Fire-EMS training center, and a regional animal shelter.

One demonstration of the city's contemporary approach is its efforts to attract information technology/software and biotechnology businesses. A prime example is its purchase of two warehouses along what has been historically known as "Warehouse Row" to encourage clustering of technology businesses within this distinctive downtown area." The city is leasing these buildings to a newly formed partnership with the Roanoke Valley Development Corp. and Carilion Health System. This Warehouse Row Business Center is designed to provide contemporary, flexible space with high broadband infrastructure to support emerging technology companies.

Through the city's collaboration with Carilion Health System (a \$1.4 billion, 10-hospital healthcare network), the Riverside Centre for Research and Technology, a 75-acre biotechnology research park, is being developed at the edge of downtown. This public/private partnership will allow the city to revitalize and

the center is expected to create about 2,500 jobs.

The Riverside Centre for Research and Technology will house established companies and young companies alike, fostering an entrepreneurial environment where business synergies can be reaped. The center will be home to the Carilion Biomedical Institute, a non-profit organization that fosters biomedical research at the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech. It will commercialize the most promising research coming from these



Warehouse Row Business Center provides contemporary space with broadband infrastructure.

world-class research institutions with the goal of creating economic development in central and southwest Virginia. The center will be located between two Carilion Health System hospital facilities, affording companies in the park close proximity to



The Roanoke Higher Education Center houses 17 institutions of higher learning.

Prevention Community. In addition, as of September 2002, it was the only city in the nation that operates nationally accredited Sheriff, Police and Fire-EMS services.

- **Education/Training.** The city promotes life-long education as a way to empower residents and increase the community's skill level to ensure that both the city and the region have the necessary flexibility to attract new



City leaders have worked to preserve the history of downtown through private/public projects.

business and keep pace with emerging technologies. In addition to quality public schools, this has been accomplished through initiatives such as its partnership in the Roanoke Higher Education Center and the city's Leadership College.

- **Environment.** Roanoke has implemented a number of innovative and visionary actions to enhance, conserve and protect its natural resources, including support of the development of a greenway system; improvement of systems for solid

waste collection and recycling; and the establishment of Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days.

Roanoke is true to its nature. It doesn't pretend to be a big city, but refuses to exist as a sleepy little town. Instead, it is defined as a place that has repositioned itself around the challenges of today's world by integrating its history with modern approaches to business and living. The drive to seek new and unexplored frontiers will always be a part of Roanoke. City leaders hope that their example will serve to stimulate every other community in America to think they can aspire to do what Roanoke has done.

The city's leadership has demonstrated a commitment to create a vision and look for change; to set in place a process that will lead to growth and vitality; and to create "livability."

About the author

Melinda Mayo is print communications coordinator for the City of Roanoke.

Richmond blends history, neighborhoods, business climate

FOR THE 5 MILLION people who visit annually, Richmond is recognized increasingly for the many salient yet unheralded qualities long enjoyed by those who already live there.

The livability of the city can be measured in many ways: the beauty of its neighborhoods, a strong business climate rated among the Top Ten “best places for business” by *Forbes*, a historic treasure trove tracing to the early English settlers, and a thriving cultural and educational heritage befitting its nearly 200,000 residents.

Honored as one of America’s 30 “Most Livable Communities” in April by Partners for Livable Communities – a non-profit leadership organization working to improve the livability of communities –

By Linwood Norman

Virginia’s capital city is now acknowledged for developing innovative strategies that will chart the success of its future well into the 21st century.

Richmond, a recipient in the 100,000-300,000 population category, joins other localities such as Winston-Salem, N.C., St. Petersburg, Fla., Santa Rosa, Calif., Saint Paul, Minn., Louisville, Ky. and Birmingham, Ala.

Richmond’s revitalized neighborhoods are often a surprise to visitors. From restored tobacco warehouse loft apartments in Shockoe Bottom to stately homes along Monument Avenue, more than 100 unique neighborhoods satisfy virtually every taste and lifestyle. The fastest residential growth is occurring downtown, with more than a 30 percent climb in recent years.

Home restoration in six other historic neighborhoods, including Jackson Ward and Barton Heights, is rapidly advancing because of the city’s nationally-recognized “Neighborhoods in Bloom” program.

In tandem with Richmond’s scope of attractive neighborhoods is its broad, diversified employment base. Reflecting its New Economy embrace, major Richmond business extends from chemical, food and tobacco manufacturing to financial services, semiconductors and high-tech fibers.

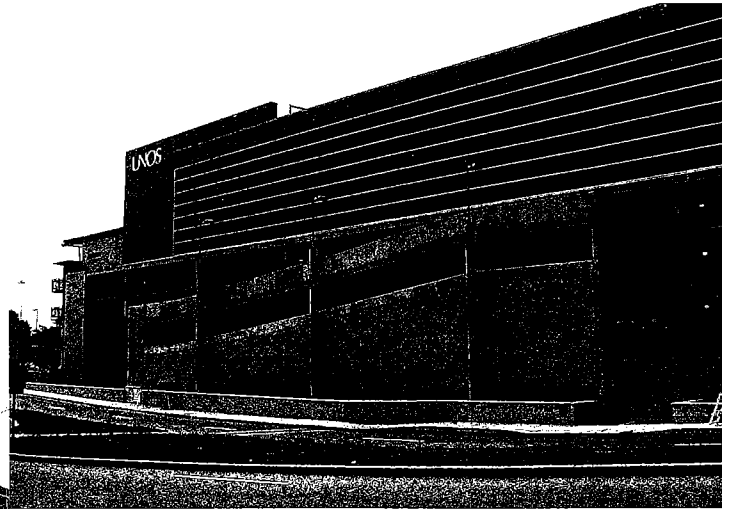
The Virginia BioTechnology Research Park, the state’s first technology incubator located downtown near VCU Medical Center, contributes to Richmond’s growing reputation as a new East Coast capital of biotechnology and life sciences.



The scenic James River, which meanders through the center of Richmond, draws many outdoor enthusiasts.

Ten Fortune 500 or 1,000 companies are based in Greater Richmond. Philip Morris USA and Wachovia Securities selected the city for their new headquarters. Jobs are migrating back within the city limits as major companies such as Dominion Re-

history. Convention-related activity pumps an estimated \$90 million annually into the local



The Virginia BioTechnology Research Park (left, above) is located downtown near the VCU Medical Center.

sources expand operations. Reflecting its strong courtship with the business community, the metropolitan area gained more than 8,000 jobs between December and March alone.

Described as a “testament to America’s New South,” Richmond’s downtown was ranked second in the South (behind St. Petersburg, Fla.) by *Southern Business & Development* for having the culture, history and urbane flavor of the Northeast along with the modern infrastructure, pleasant climate and lower cost of living of the South.

Richmond also has been recognized during the past year as one of the nation’s best places for business and careers (*Forbes*), as a top metro area for corporate headquarters (*Business Facilities*), and as a top place for European expansion (*Expansion Management*).

Yet aside from being a great place to live and work, Richmond is an outstanding tourist destination – and one of the fastest growing convention cities in the U.S.

The massive \$170 million Greater Richmond Convention Center, funded by the city and neighboring counties, represents the largest regional collaboration in Virginia’s

economy, and conference bookings remain ahead of schedule well

that is expected to bring an estimated 400,000 tourists to Richmond.

Within a mere three-block stretch of downtown’s Broad Street, for example, a new federal courthouse, a luxury 329-room convention hotel and a new performing arts center will rise from the ruins of demolished older buildings just across from the convention center.

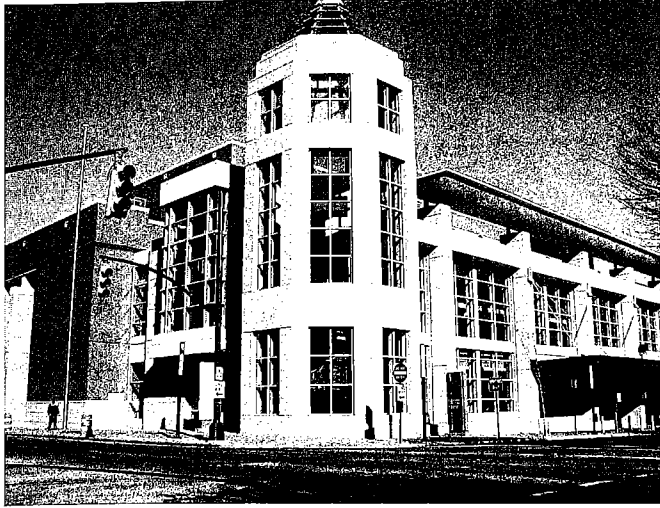
To finance major utility infrastructure and streetscape improvements, as well as additional downtown parking, Richmond became the

into 2008.

Economic development in Richmond, both downtown and citywide, totals nearly \$3 billion. Much of downtown is being transformed in time for the 400th anniversary of Jamestown in 2007, an event



Neighborhoods can range from collections of converted tobacco warehouses to stately tree-lined streets.



The Greater Richmond Convention Center represents the largest regional collaboration in state history.

first Virginia city to orchestrate a “community development authority” (CDA) bond sale that raised \$66.7 million. As a result, Richmond is a model among other Virginia localities in need of money for their own urban renewal projects.

Richmond is known for its abundant landmarks, enhanced by nearly four centuries of history. From the state Capitol and the restored Main Street Train Station to the Edgar Allan Poe Museum and the Tredegar National Civil War Center, the city’s menu of historic attractions offers something for most everyone.

With an abundance of diverse architectural styles over the years, Richmond also is a darling of the film industry. “Line of Fire,” a recent ABC-TV series, was staged here in addition to independent movies such as “Iron Jawed Angels,” “The Contender” and “Hannibal.”

Richmond is known for a burgeoning “creative class” of urban professionals ranging from artists and musicians to inventors and researchers. Richmond is among only a handful of mid-sized cities to offer a flourishing cultural community enhanced by several first-class museums and prominent universities, its own symphony, professional ballet and opera, and numerous theater companies and art galleries.

With easy access to the ocean, mountains and Washington, D.C.,

Richmond also features countless pleasurable pastimes at home: trendy boutiques and restaurants of most every cuisine, sports and entertainment attractions, and recreational pursuits such as the festivals, picnics and fitness trails within the city’s 40 parks that encompass more than 1,500 acres.

With the scenic James River meandering

through its center, Richmond has long been the favorite of outdoor enthusi-

asts enamored with the city’s natural environs.

One of the nation’s largest river park systems, the James offers some of the best urban whitewater rafting in the U.S. as well as canoeing, kayaking and rock climbing. Fifty pound blue catfish and abundant American shad and small-mouth bass comb the waters while overhead, nesting American bald eagles and peregrine falcons call Richmond their home.

For the human population, whether they live, work or play here, Richmond offers a realm of amenities that promise virtually no end to personal enjoyment.

About the author

Linwood Norman is a marketing and public relations specialist for the City of Richmond.