



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2016.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Category: \_\_\_\_\_

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Complete Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## One-page overview: Creation of Virginia's River Realm

Web: [www.virginiasriverrealm.com](http://www.virginiasriverrealm.com)

Facebook: [Virginia's River Realm](https://www.facebook.com/VirginiasRiverRealm)

Twitter: [@VAsRiverRealm](https://twitter.com/VAsRiverRealm)

Instagram: [virginiasriverrealm](https://www.instagram.com/virginiasriverrealm)

Virginia's River Realm is a newly created "micro region" of Lancaster and Middlesex counties designed to attract "more people, staying longer and spending more money" as well as extending our visitor season beyond the traditional Memorial to Labor Day window. This newly created "brand" and its marketing messages are unique in that the area being marketed crosses traditional government boundaries and looks at destination travel from the visitors' view point where geographic boundaries are fluid. Planning to go to a "county" could be unlikely but going to "the river" is a clearer message in the mind of the customer.

This collaborative approach is paying dividends in having a bigger pool of attractions\lodging\dining options for travelers. The two areas complement each other in many ways from lodging to dining to shopping. Small towns are interesting and especially enticing when the visitor is coming from a crowded RVA or the metro Washington DC area. We have pooled funds, talents and resources to create a product that is being well received locally and by on line interest.

Visitors often become second home owners or permanent residents. Whether travelers or citizens, all will have a positive outcome on our local economy.

We invite you and our visitors to Find Your Shoreline (literally or figuratively), that happy place where life's pressures are left behind.



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Virginia's River Realm is a newly created "micro region" of Lancaster and Middlesex counties designed to attract "more people, staying longer and spending more money" as well as extending our visitor season beyond the traditional Memorial to Labor Day window. This newly created "brand" and its marketing messages are unique in that the area being marketed crosses traditional government boundaries and looks at destination travel from the visitors' view point where geographic boundaries are fluid. Together, the assets of Lancaster, Kilmarnock and Middlesex offer a broader visitor experience. It is only through their pooled resources that all jurisdictions can leverage the necessary messaging. This singular regional platform allows great strides giving a single, much louder voice in the tourism industry.

This collaborative approach pays dividends in having a bigger pool of attractions\lodging\dining options for travelers. The two areas complement each other in many ways from lodging to dining to shopping. Small towns are interesting and especially enticing when the visitor is coming from a crowded RVA or the metro Washington DC area. We have pooled funds, talents and resources to create a product that is being well received locally and by on line interest.

Our regional branding initiative will accomplish the following:

- Direct tax revenue impact in lodging and meals tax. Increase tax revenues for the counties and town through overnight stays, meals tax and sales taxes generated.

- Introduce visitors to our oyster trail, artisan trail and waterman's heritage tours which will create new sources of revenue for local waterman and craftsman that are currently in a critical state of decline.

- Revive previously thriving tourism communities through the promotion of our waterfront, waterfront tours, cultural, culinary, historical and arts assets. This will help these localities as well as other partners in the waterman's tours, oyster trail and artisan trail.

It is believed that proven success increasing tourism traffic will benefit neighboring localities as well and thereby offering a richer experience for the tourist. Visitors often become second home owners or permanent residents. Whether travelers or citizens, all will have a positive outcome on our local economy.

We invite you and our visitors to Find Your Shoreline (literally or figuratively), that happy place where life's pressures are left behind.



VACO 2016 Achievement Awards-  
Lancaster and Middlesex County submission:  
Virginia's River Realm-Tourism Branding

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## What is Virginia's River Realm?

Full of delightful surprises, hidden gems, and friendly small-town spirit. The 465 miles of shoreline, eight great small towns, and hundreds of unique attractions invite visitors to enjoy the wonder of a perfect oyster, the promise of a back road or secret cove and the pleasure of sharing a table with friends. A place where you can catch your breath, calm your mind and live your dreams.



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State the problem, challenge or situation faced by the locality and how the program fulfilled the awards criteria (innovation, partnering or collaboration and a model for other localities).

*Problem Statement: Increase tourism related spending in the region. But no specific messaging directed to the visitor and their new travel patterns from our "region" exists. How to build a "Brand" that markets our immediate region to travelers in our targeted markets of Northern VA\Southern MD, RVA and Hampton Roads*

*Objective: More People, Staying Longer, Spending More and Extending Our Tourism Season*

Background: Middlesex County was established from Lancaster County in 1669 with the Town of Kilmarnock becoming incorporated within Lancaster County in 1930. There is a long history between these three jurisdictions, not all cooperative. In fact, the Rappahannock River has been viewed as a divider between the localities with little cooperation between Lancaster and Middlesex until recently. The river is actually the reason the counties separated in 1669. Fortunately, however the creation of the Virginia Tourism Plan and the State's push to educate governments about the importance of tourism to our economies, these localities are now viewing the river as a shared tourism asset and reaching across it to raise the tide that will float all boats, so to speak, with regard to tourism dollars. *The goal of these efforts is to create a singular "mini region" marketing platform.*

Kilmarnock and Lancaster County are active members of the larger regional DMO, the Northern Neck Tourism Commission (a five county entity). Middlesex County is its own DMO. While the NNTC is effective for the much larger geographic area, the lower portion of the Northern Neck and Middlesex need to elevate their identity with a focused marketing message and call to action.

Currently Kilmarnock has a marketing message of: "We're the Commercial Hub of the lower Northern Neck". However, in utilizing the Town of Kilmarnock government website to convey this tourism message, it's not coming across as clearly as it should. The Town of Kilmarnock is however fully utilizing Facebook and is trying to convey their message there. Like the other

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## VACO 2016 Achievement Awards- Lancaster and Middlesex County submission: Virginia's River Realm-Tourism Branding

localities this is having limited success in that it is lacking a singular platform and voice to bring traffic to its page and raise awareness of their assets and the regions assets.

Lancaster County supports tourism and participates as a member of the Northern Neck Tourism Commission. However, they currently only have a government focused website with limited tourism information and are not currently utilizing Facebook or other social media outlets.

Middlesex County in August of 2013 created an economic development and tourism department. With the hiring of the one staff individual for this department the county has just developed a visitor website which is separate from its government site. They are also beginning to utilize social media. A crippling factor to these efforts is the lack of a brand, marketing message, or call for action. The initiative to develop a singular platform for a regional branding initiative will be critical to the success of this new department.

The Lancaster by the Bay Chamber of Commerce has used "Travel Lancaster County" as its tourism web platform for the entire county (not just its members) with a marketing message of "we're close by" to major markets but no distinct call to action.

*The variety of messaging, only some of which is targeting the visitor experience, and the lack of a definitive call to action-these are the drivers for this "micro regional" effort. We must get away from utilizing the county\towns as the geographic drivers as visitors don't recognize these distinctions in their travel planning and decisions.*

The DRIVE Tourism approach (a program of Virginia Tourism Corporation) identifies Nature & Outdoor Recreation, History & Heritage, Town/City Centers, Culinary (Agri-tourism/Aqua-tourism, Wineries), Events, Arts & Music and Commercial Attractions (Higher-end) as primary and secondary product focus areas. These product focus areas, ~~for~~ as these three localities are all centered on the Rappahannock River and the Chesapeake Bay, ~~the~~ share the ~~+~~ asset that keeps us in the hearts of our residents and tourists. Unfortunately, our divided efforts have been failing in a large part to capture the next generation of tourists s and as such our

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## VACO 2016 Achievement Awards- Lancaster and Middlesex County submission: Virginia's River Realm-Tourism Branding

communities are at risk [of decline](#) or in a state of decline. Many efforts have been made to reintroduce and identify ourselves to Virginia tourists which primarily have focused on identifying one area as the Northern Neck for marketing purposes and the other area as the Middle Peninsula.

This [initiative's](#) portion of the larger region is unique in its proximity to the Chesapeake Bay, the amount of waterfront and the quantity and variety of tourism assets.

~~(combine into 1 paragraph)~~

This smaller footprint clamors to be distinguished from the larger whole. ***Together, the assets of Lancaster, Kilmarnock and Middlesex offer a broader visitor experience. It is only through our pooled resources that we can leverage the necessary messaging. This singular regional platform will make great strides to give us a single, much louder voice in the tourism industry.***

Our regional branding initiative will accomplish the following:

- Increase regional visitation to local Bed-and-breakfasts, motels, hotels and restaurants by reintroducing our area to tourists-particularly in the close in drive markets of Richmond, Hampton Roads and NOVA.

- Direct tax revenue impact in lodging and meals tax. Increase tax revenues for the counties and town through overnight stays, meals tax and sales taxes generated.

- Revive previously thriving tourism communities through the promotion of our waterfront, waterfront tours, cultural, culinary, historical and arts assets. This will help these three localities as well as other partners in the waterman's tours, oyster trail and artisan trail.

- Introduce visitors to our oyster trail, artisan trail and waterman's heritage tours which will create new sources of revenue for local waterman and craftsman that are currently in a critical state of decline.

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It is believed that proven success increasing tourism traffic will benefit neighboring localities as well and thereby offering a richer experience for the tourist.

**And thus Virginia's River Realm was born!** Efforts were underway as of summer 2014 to develop a "micro region" with authentic messaging designed to increase tourism traffic. We are now in full operation with marketing messages targeting our demographic and geographic targets. See messaging in the attached figures.

**How the program fulfilled the awards criteria (innovation, partnering or collaboration and a model for other localities).**

*This is a unique partnership in that it crosses the traditional lines created by geography, county boundaries and planning district boundaries. Both of the "governmentally imposed" boundaries are not seen, nor understood by visitors so we needed something different that reflected the mindset of the consumer.*

We addressed the critical wants of our target audiences: authentic experiences, a clearly stated connection to "place" and an easy way to know what to do. Our messaging, website and social media platforms do just that.

**Tell how the program was carried out, including financing and staffing, and the program's results.**

Virginia's River Realm is a "pay to play" partnership. Lancaster, Middlesex and the Town of Kilmarnock are equal financial partners with one of the local Chambers of Commerce, Lancaster by the Bay Chamber, a partner at a lower investment.

The initial investment was \$25,000 from the counties and town and \$1,000 from the Chamber. Kilmarnock and Middlesex provided the staff resourcing from Susan Cockrell, Deputy Town Manager who also handles community and economic development and Michelle Brown, Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator for Middlesex County. Other counties along the Rappahannock were approached but could not participate for a reasons unique to each county. That door remains open.

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Early work involved engaging the community on what the features and emotional connections were that they were proud of. These attributes became the heart of our brand statement:

*“Once you let the river set the pace, life here seems deliciously simple, its mysteries suddenly revealed. The wonder of a perfect oyster. The promise of a back road or secret cove. The pleasure of sharing a table with friends. The peace of whispering pines at sunset. While you’re here on these shores, away from life’s urgent demands and time’s hold on you, your choice is clear.”*

Micro Region’s Name: **Virginia’s River Realm**

Tagline: **Find Your Shoreline**

**Actions:**

- We created an “Ambassador” program as a way to engage our entrepreneurs to buy into the program and embrace the branding as a community effort. Ambassador partners receive Ambassador cards to give to their customer base. These cards highlight the various ways to connect with Virginia’s River Realm. (See Figure 6.)
- We are co-branding with local event partners to both support the marketing of these events and for the events to showcase the VRR brand. For example, the Urbanna Cup rack cards have a VRR map and social media contact information on the reverse. This will be the case for Taste by the Bay- an art, craft beer, food and music event in November at the Tides Inn. VRR was a part of the Deltaville Seafood Festival in May and will be at Rhythm, Brews and BBQ – a music festival in Kilmarnock in June. (See Figure 7.)
- We are marketing through local/regional print outlets, very active on social media and are marketing “live and in person” at various events.
- We are utilizing the power of VTC to reach into larger markets through their digital marketing programs.
- We encourage the judges to go to our website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram sites.
  - Web: [www.virginiasriverrealm.com](http://www.virginiasriverrealm.com)
  - Facebook: Virginia's River Realm

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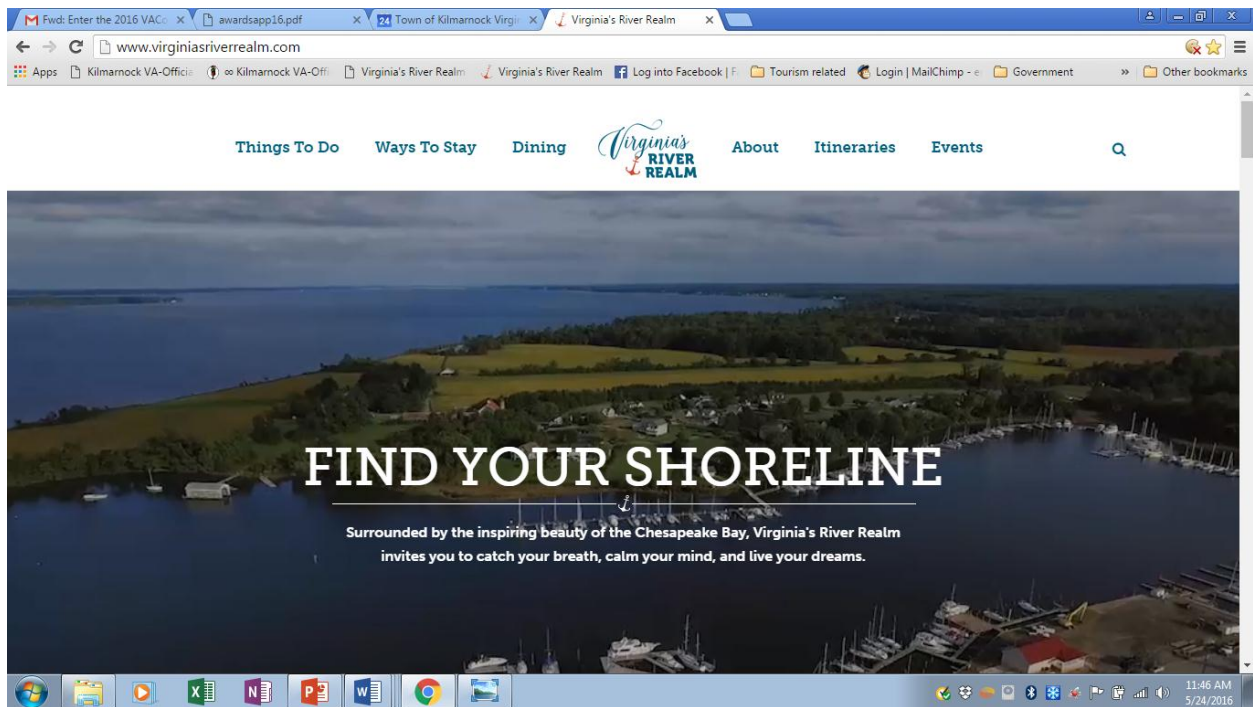
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- Twitter: @VAsRiverRealm
- Instagram: virginiasriverrealm

Attached are screen shots of our website, social media and marketing placements.

### WEBSITE SCREENSHOTS:

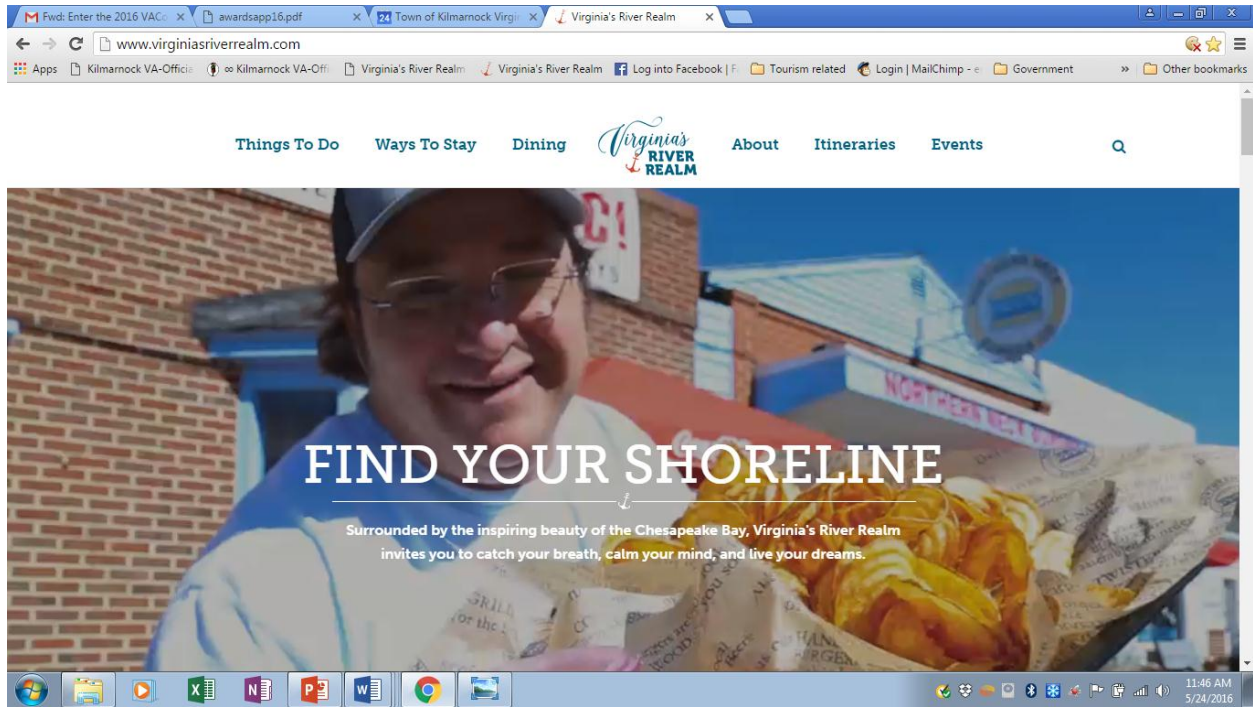
#### HOME PAGE WITH ROTATING VIDEOS



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## VACO 2016 Achievement Awards- Lancaster and Middlesex County submission: Virginia's River Realm-Tourism Branding

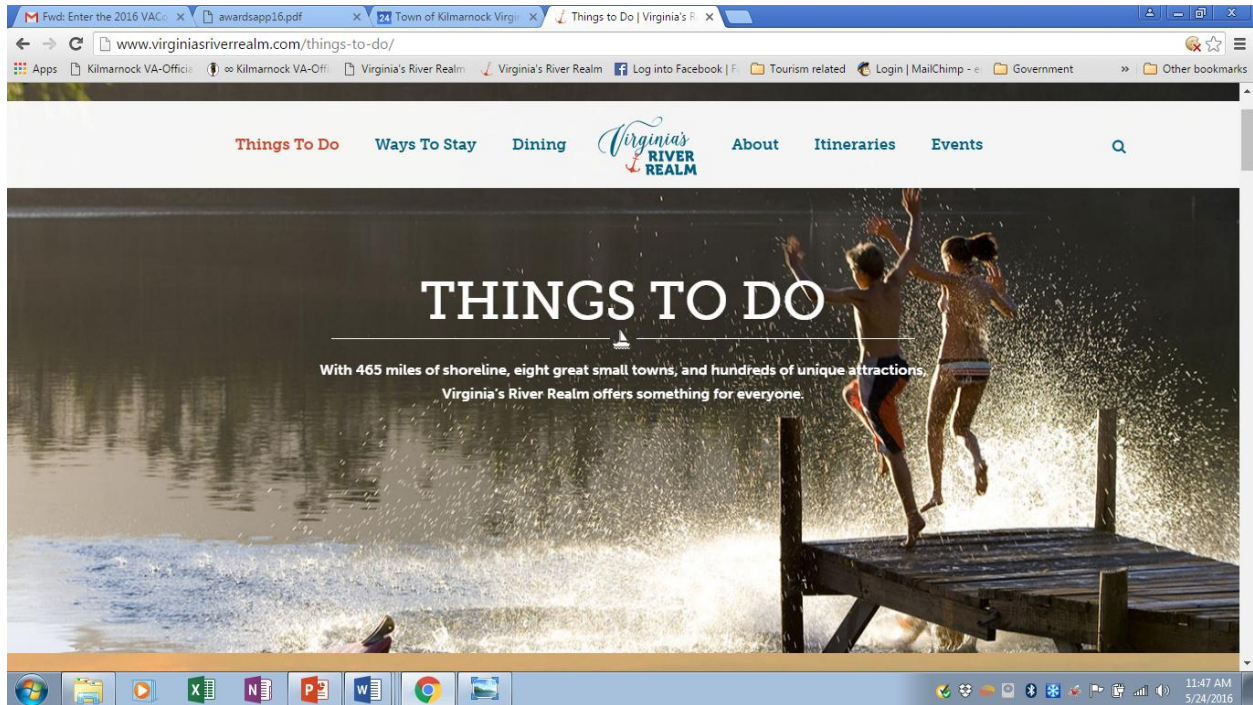


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THINGS TO DO: ON THE WATER, OUTDOORS, UNNIQUELY OURS, SHOPPING, HISTORY, UNWIND

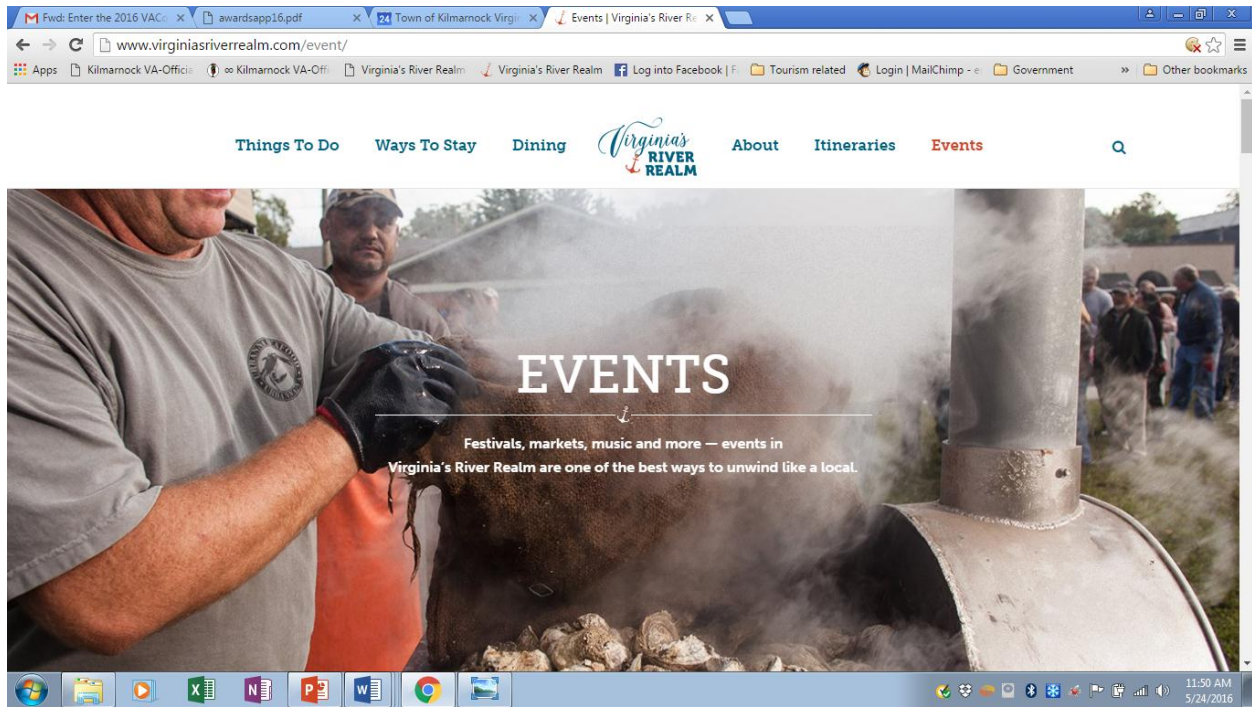


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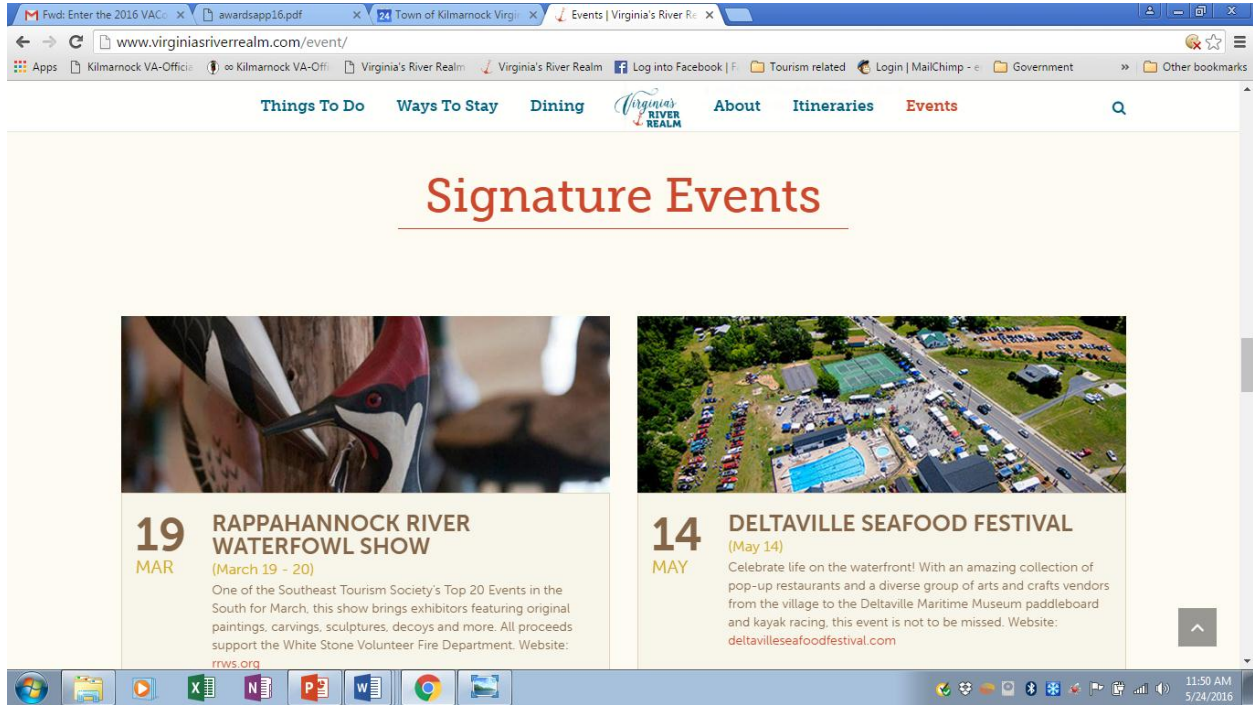
## VACO 2016 Achievement Awards- Lancaster and Middlesex County submission: Virginia's River Realm-Tourism Branding

### SIGNATURE EVENTS:



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Welcome to  
**Virginia's  
 River Realm**



**Find Us!**

[www.virginiariverrealm.com](http://www.virginiariverrealm.com)

-  Virginia's River Realm
-  @VAsRiverRealm
-  virginiariverrealm

Once you let the river set the pace, life here seems deliciously simple, its mysteries suddenly revealed. The wonder of a perfect oyster. The promise of a back road or secret cove. The pleasure of sharing a table with friends. The peace of whispering pines at sunset. While you're here on these shores, away from life's urgent demands and time's hold on you, your choice is clear.

*Announcing the launch of Virginia's River Realm, a partnership between the counties of Lancaster and Middlesex, the Town of Kilmarnock and Lancaster by the Bay Chamber of Commerce to invite visitors to our area through promotion of our great festival events, our outdoor experiences, our hospitality businesses and our enchanting river lifestyle.*

Surrounded by the inspiring beauty of the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia's River Realm invites you to catch your breath, calm your mind, and live your dreams. **FIND YOUR SHORELINE.**

Figure 1: EDITORIAL IN LANCASTER CHAMBER'S 2016 VISITOR GUIDE & DIRECTORY

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465 miles of shoreline, 7 great small towns & unique attractions invite you to a place where you can catch your breath, calm your mind and live your dreams.


Plan your trip at [VirginiasRiverRealm.com](http://VirginiasRiverRealm.com)

Figure 2 PLACEMENT IN CHAMBER DIRECTORY 2016




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**Explore Virginia's River Realm**



**Find Us!**  
[www.virginiasriverrealm.com](http://www.virginiasriverrealm.com)

-  Virginia's River Realm
-  @VAsRiverRealm
-  virginiasriverrealm

Once you let the river set the pace, life here seems deliciously simple, its mysteries suddenly revealed. The wonder of a perfect oyster. The promise of a back road or secret cove. The pleasure of sharing a table with friends. The peace of whispering pines at sunset. While you're here on these shores, away from life's urgent demands and time's hold on you, your choice is clear.

*Visit our eight small charming towns for shopping, dining and living the river lifestyle. Get back to nature with camping, boating and fishing. Home to the Urbanna Oyster Festival, sailing regattas, old-fashioned baseball, dirt cart racing, trolley rides, museums, wineries and waterman-led eco-tours, these amazing things-to-do are only a handful of activities the River Realm has to offer. This time is your time, spend it creating memories with your family and friends!*

Explore all the things to do in Virginia's River Realm! Invite your friends and family to experience the river this summer. **FIND YOUR SHORELINE.**

Figure 3 LOCAL SCOOP NORTHERN NECK EDITION SPRING 2016

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**Explore  
Virginia's  
River Realm**

*Virginia's  
RIVER  
REALM*  
FIND YOUR SHORELINE  
VirginiasRiverRealm.com

**Find Us!**  
[www.virginiariverrealm.com](http://www.virginiariverrealm.com)

- Virginia's River Realm
- @VAsRiverRealm
- virginiasriverrealm

Just an hour from Williamsburg, eight small charming towns are waiting for you – shopping, dining and living the river lifestyle. Home to festivals like Arts in the Middle, Rhythm, Brews & BBQ or the Irvington Crab Festival, outdoor music events, old-fashioned baseball in a 1940's era park, and waterman-led eco-boat tours, these amazing things-to-do are only a handful of activities the River Realm has to offer. This time is your time, spend it creating memories with your family and friends!

Explore all the things to do in Virginia's River Realm! Come experience the river this summer. **FIND YOUR SHORELINE.**

Figure 4 LOCAL SCOOP SUMMER 2016 WILLIAMSBURG EDITION

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Figure 5 VIRGINIA TOURISM CO-OP DIGITAL MEDIA OUTDOORS

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Ultra Thick Business Cards: Back side



Figure 6 AMBASSADOR PROGRAMS CARDS

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Figure 7 PARTNERSHIP BRANDING URBANNA CUP

PROGRAM RESULTS:

Our brand development is complete and our new look and messaging is running through our web, social media and marketing placements. The launch officially occurred in early March, 2016.

Measures of Success:

While it is too early to assess tax revenue dollars as an indicator, however several other measures indicate significant momentum in the brand and its message.

Website Activity: (source Google Analytics)

- 4,525 visitors have created 5,643 sessions-we have a 20% returning visitor rate.

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- Our top locations for visitors are outside of our immediate area (exactly what we wanted): Virginia Beach, Washington DC, Richmond
- 52% of our page views are greater than 1 minute and our visitor views slightly over 2 pages.
- Surprising, our demographics show 56% male visitors and a younger demo at 25-34 showing the most activity.
- Nearly 100 email signups to date for our newsletters.

### Social Media: (source Facebook Insights)

- Facebook targets our Boomer demographic and is where we see Women, 45 years and older as the activity drivers of our 465-member fan base.
- Again, our top locations for Fans are outside of our immediate area: Baltimore, Richmond, Washington DC markets-which is very exciting.

### Marketing Approaches:

#### Local market:

- We've created an Ambassador program for local residents and businesses to embrace the brand and be advocates through their own businesses. Ambassador cards are being given out that show all our online touch points. We have partnered with museums, retail outlets and community associations with more to come. (See Figure 6.)
- Logo Share program: Local attractions and tourism related businesses can utilize our logo with a link back to virginiasriverrealm.com. We have a dozen entities utilizing the logo on their sites so far.
- Partnering with local events: VRR will be at a number of large scale events, collecting email addresses and handing out items with the logo and web addresses. (See Figure 7.)
- Placement with our partner, Lancaster by the Bay Chamber of Commerce, introducing VRR in their 2016 Visitor Guide.

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- Placement in the Local Scoop Magazine-on line and print: targeting the Northern Neck\Middle Peninsula, introducing VRR.
- Partnering with local events to co- brand. First effort is with the Urbanna Cup where their rack cards feature VRR information on the back side. (See Figure 7.)

We have already embarked on media placements to drive visitation and impact lodging and meals tax revenues as we move into the summer\fall travel season.

- VTC Co-op: Outdoors digital placement in April, 2016: Over 938,000 impressions; Top engagements from the Washington, Charlotte, Baltimore & Philadelphia markets; 504 click throughs- .05%
- The Flagship & 4 other on line publications targeting the military market in Hampton Roads. Running in May.
- Placement in the Local Scoop Magazine-on line and print: targeting the Williamsburg market, introducing VRR and all the options for things to do. Part of the day tripper and weekend market.
- VTC Co-op: Culinary digital placement in September, 2016

3. Include a short overview of the program (no more than one page double-spaced) that can be used as a quick reference guide for judges. Separate Document: Lancaster Middlesex achievement awards 1 page overview 16 Virginias River Realm

4. Include a brief summary of the program (3-4 paragraphs) that could be used for press releases, brochures, etc. Separate Document: Lancaster Middlesex achievement awards 4 paragraphs 16 Virginias River Realm

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